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LONDON : CHAPMAN & HALL, 193, PICCADILLY.

M R. A R L E.

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BY THE AUTHOR OF
“BRUNA’S REVENGE,”
“MY SON’S WIFE,”
“COLONEL DACRE,”
“CASTE,”
“PEARL,”
ETC.

“Love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove.”—SHAKSPEARE.

NEW EDITION.

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CHAPMAN AND HALL, 193, PICCADILLY.
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M R. A R L E.

CHAPTER I.

HILDA STANTON lingered in her garden, gazing down upon the lake-gemmed Wynndale; watching how one-half of the placid water still mirrored the hues of a bright sunset — while the other, overshadowed by abruptly-rising hills, lay black and gleamless. When she at length stirred and turned—her cheek paled by the chillness of the evening, or by the thoughts that set so resolute a look on the young face—it was to raise her eyes towards the wavy ridge of moorland, behind which the crescent moon was about to drop. Every bush and tall tuft of heather on the undulating line was sharply defined against the clear sky—so was a human figure which moved to and fro along it. Hilda's dark eyes intently watched this solitary some one a while. The little moon disappeared; the sky grew grey. When she again looked down upon the valley, twilight had settled down soberly; the lake was a dark

mass, dimly discernible ; white mists shrouded the village, and crept stealthily up the clefts of the hills.

In the garden the dew fell heavily : it was cold to-night, though the air was richly laden with the fragrance of summer flowers. Hilda shivered, drew her light shawl round her, and went towards the house.

Drawing near an open window, by which she meant to enter, the sound of voices reached her, and she quietly retreated. A last look towards the moor showed her that nothing moved along its edge now. After a moment's irresolute pause, she drew her shawl over her head, gipsy fashion, went through the shrubbery, out by a little gate into the lane.

She slowly followed the winding way for some distance, then drew back into the shadow of a group of firs in the hedge-row, and stood still.

The wind moaned through the crests of the old trees, hoarsely complaining, like a troubled sea on a wild shore—a music very familiar to the girl beneath—there was always some sound among those gaunt branches. Hilda had not waited here very long before she knew that some one was coming down the lane : footfalls were muffled by the fallen foliage of firs which thickly strewed the path, but Hilda's ears had caught these a long way off. A gentleman was passing the spot where she stood, walking slowly with downcast eyes ; but she stept out of the shadow and lightly touched his arm. He started, and turned almost an angry look on her.

“ Did I frighten you, Hendon ? ” she asked, somewhat surprised at the expression of his face.

“ You certainly did, Hilda ; I did not expect to meet

you wandering out in such gipsey-guise—the evening is quite cold, and the dew heavy!"

"And you have been on the moor for hours, sir!—so do not lecture me—remember, I was always stronger than you."

"But it is not proper for a lady to be out alone, so late; my sisters would not think of it," the young man said, in an irritated tone.

"I dare say not," Hilda answered, "but I am very different; I never take cold, and my country heart is not afraid. But no disputing, if you please. I have something to say to you."

"I intended coming to your house, to-night," Mr. Meynard said, drawing her hand through his arm, and looking more gracious.

"Of course; but some one was with papa—we might have been interrupted. I want to speak to you alone."

"What is it? You are not angry?"

"No! But I should like to know one thing, Hendon; was it only care for me that made you so little glad to see me?"

"Little glad! I assure you——"

"Don't assure me of anything—I do not accuse you of anything. It was natural! You had built some stately castle in the air, were inhabiting it grandly, when the touch of this too real and substantial hand made it vanish—dissolve, like 'the baseless fabric of a dream.' Was it not so?" she asked, with a smile more sad than merry.

Mr. Meynard pressed the little hand upon his arm, asking—

"And do you suppose, Hilda, that you were absent from my thoughts?"

As if trying to ward off his tenderness, she answered, lightly—

“I do not know! You staid long alone this last evening. I suppose you were so well pleased with my shadowy presence, that you wanted no more.”

Her companion looked vexed—“You are unkind,” he said.

“Am I?” was asked, softly.

“Yes; I must remind you that this is our last meeting for long. Think how many times we have walked here together, dear Hilda, can’t you fancy these old trees know us?”

She was silent, and, in the gathering dusk, he could not see her face distinctly, he went on—

“It was when we were walking through this lane once, soon after our engagement, and my father’s death, that you spoke words that first kindled ambition in me. Some very different speech of my mother’s, lately, since we lost poor Hartley, recalled them. Do you remember when I mean? We spent a long day on the moor, and your father joined us in the evening, and we had much grave talk about life, and ——”

“No more reminiscences, pray!” Hilda interrupted, hurriedly; “I tried then to do a woman’s work, to rouse a man to brave endeavour, but I failed. Circumstances have changed your position; perhaps, now, you might find your work near you, where Hartley found his. No matter! But do you remember the spirit of my father’s words?—is your present ambition at all in accordance with it?”

“You may still be my councillor, Hilda, you will be.”

“No ; one girl’s voice won’t avail if it is raised against the world’s ; besides, I am ignorant, and, your mother thinks, romantic ; if I retained my influence, I might only confuse you by my ‘unpractical’ way of judging of things and people. And,” she added, “I am already tired of struggling against things stronger than myself ; the struggle must cease. Only, dear Hendon, be true to yourself as a man, a Christian, and all may still be well for you !”

“What do you mean, Hilda ? do you doubt my love, my constancy, my ——”

“It is not that ; that won’t signify ; at least—I mean—I am a coward ; but I must speak now, and you must please to listen patiently.”

Her voice trembled, so did the hand upon his arm.

“Hilda !”

“Remember that I do not speak in anger, from caprice, or jealousy ; but in very sober seriousness. Since we were first engaged, your position has altered very much, Hendon.”

“You cannot think me so mean, so base, so——”

“Hush, pray ! Your father loved me, your mother does not ; even when you were ‘a younger son,’ she thought you were throwing yourself away. I do not complain ; it is natural that she should be ambitious for you. I will not stand between you. Our engagement must end now. Be quiet a moment more, you have not heard all. It is not only *your* position that has altered ; we have both noticed a change in papa. You spoke to me of it when you were here last, and I then evaded your questions. I knew what must come, though I refused to

believe it. He has talked to me—led me on, step by step, with him—made me feel that what is very hard is only right ; he has decided upon leaving Wynndale and the church ; nothing more about the future yet ; he may, if his health improves, become minister to some body of dissenters.”

“Mr. Stanton ! Absurd ! You must have mistaken, Hilda. A gentleman in his position, he will not so disgrace himself !”

Hilda withdrew her hand from Mr. Meynard’s arm. “Disgrace !” she repeated, slowly ; “I did not expect to hear that word applied to my father first by you.”

“It cannot be true !” he went on without heeding her words ; “yet, if it were—but it *shall* not be—it has nothing to do with us—with what you said before.”

“Will Mrs. Meynard think so ? Didn’t *you* speak of disgrace ? We shall be poor when papa gives up this living. My father is not strong—suppose I am obliged to work in some way—suppose it comes to the knowledge of ‘the world,’ that Hendon Meynard, of Wynndale Hall, is engaged to a daily governess, or something of that kind ?”

Mr. Meynard, not knowing exactly how to meet these overwhelming revelations, grew angry.

“I see how it is, Hilda !” he exclaimed. “You are tired of me ; I am not clever enough for you ; you are glad of this excuse for breaking our engagement !”

“It is cruel and cowardly of you to say so. But do not let us quarrel,” she added, sweetly ; “It will be a bitter aggravation of pain, by-and-bye, to remember angry words exchanged to-night. You ought to feel

that I am doing what I believe to be right, at great cost; and, at least, you should not insult me, Hendon."

He had not tried to replace the hand she had withdrawn, and he walked on in silence. Hilda, longing for a few kind words, waited instead—a storm she knew would come. They reached her home—leaning one hand on the gate, she held the other out to her companion. He took it, grasped it passionately.

"Do you think we part so—you cold, proud girl?" he asked. "You think me fickle and worldly—think it accordant with your dignity to break an engagement you imagine cannot last long. I hold you mine still. My curse on any who comes between us! Take heed that you are ready when I claim you."

So saying he threw away the hand he had crushed in his, and turned from the house.

Hilda stood where he left her. Her first movement was to raise the hand he had so roughly used to her lips, to kiss it, where she still felt the clutch of angry fingers. He had been her child-love, her girl-love, if she had grown to an intellectual stature, to which he would never attain, the growth had been unconscious; the drapery of her love shrouded his faults from her view.

Going into the house, to her father's study, Hilda found it empty: she threw herself wearily into his chair--resting an arm on the table, pillowing her cheek on it. The light of a lamp fell full upon the beautiful bowed head and on one pale cheek; while the oaken furniture and crimson draperies of the fine old room remained in shadow.

Sitting so, in a profound quiet, Hilda tried to realize

what it was she had done:—she felt desolate, chilled to the heart—and yet she had thought it would be worse. Did she, remembering his last words, allow herself to hope?

After a while she raised her head, and a strange light was shining in her eyes—a stern resolution set upon her mouth. Just then the door was pushed open, and a dark young head looked in. Seeing Hilda, the boy came up to the table, looked inquiringly into her face, and said—“What is the matter? What makes you so pale?”

“I am tired, dear—but how is it you are up still?”

“I wanted papa; some one was here, and I’ve been waiting.”

“And now he is gone out, I think. What did you want?”

“Oh! only to talk to papa a little as we do talk, he and I. You will do almost as well.”

Hilda drew him near her, put her arm around him and rested her cheek on his head.

“What did you want to talk about, Ernest?”

“You shouldn’t ask that—papa doesn’t, but lets me come to it in my own way—but I’ll tell you. I’ve been saying over to myself, without knowing hardly, ‘the noble army of martyrs praise Thee.’ I want to know more about martyrs.”

Hilda lifted up her head quickly, the quenched light rekindled in her eyes, but she did not speak till the boy said—

“Tell me something about them.”

“‘The noble army of martyrs—’” Hilda repeated

slowly. "But, Ernest, you know well what martyrs are, you have read all about the early martyrs."

"I want to know more about how people can become martyrs *now*."

"Anybody who steadfastly does what he believes right, spite of scorn, or suffering, or pain of any kind—who suffers for well-doing, may be called a martyr."

"'Suffers for well-doing !' and I only suffer for ill-doing ! That puzzles and troubles me. It would be very grand and great to belong to the noble army. I do not see how I can."

"Why not ?"

"People don't suffer for doing right now. If Christ came now He would be loved and honoured, and no one would be able to die for Him !"

Hilda shook her head. "We must be humble," she said, "not ready to think ourselves better than people used to be. Do you think, child, you or I, could suffer what those early Christian martyrs did ? Don't we sicken and shudder reading of those things ? But never mind ! God gives us strength as he sends need. There *are* martyrs, now-a-days, Ernest ; you may haply enter the army, it grows larger always—people are not punished now for *calling* themselves Christians—but they often suffer for being Christians. Ask papa some day if this is not true. The martyrdom of life is often harder than that of death—it may be easier to make one terrible, decisive choice, than to have, all one's life, to be continually choosing afresh between Christ and the world."

"Could you be such a martyr, Hilda ?"

"I do not know—you and I are young and know very

little about real things—papa can tell you a great deal more about the kind of battling the soldiers of the noble army have to do.”

“You don’t mind talking about it?”

“No! it will do us good to think of this army—to remember that day by day God calls strong souls and true to join it, and *may* call us—only, we must be very humble and diffident of our own strength.”

“Do you remember that, before I settled to be a painter, I used to say I would be a soldier—I may be both!”

“A soldier of the noblest and best kind—a soldier of the cross—battling with evil, within and without, and bearing hurt patiently. You need not wait to be a man, before you practise yourself in this warfare.”

“It is difficult to know how to begin.”

“There doesn’t seem anything grand in little conquests, does there? But there is something good. Goodness is the only real greatness. Ernest! you must grow up a good man—I long for the time! But, now, good night. If we talk any more, those great bright eyes will never close.”

But there was a little more talk; and then Ernest went, and Hilda listened to his somewhat slow step on the echoing stair, to the closing of a heavy door, then to the quiet that fell.

If the musing into which she sunk was sombre-hued, that was unusual; for her ignorant thoughts of life had hitherto always been warmly tinted by a glowing imagination.

The striking of a clock made her remember how late

it was, and that her father had not returned. On enquiry, she found that he had been sent for to a neighbouring village, and had left word that she should not sit up.

She obeyed, because she was very weary, and her father's eyes would ask questions she would rather answer in the morning. According to nightly custom, she went to look at Ernest; he was asleep; shading the light from him, she stood beside him longer than usual. It was a very dark face laid upon the white pillow, not beautiful with any mere physical beauty now the fine eyes were shut; but she could read subtle, suggestive promise in its every line. The boy stirred, and muttered something in his sleep; Hilda heard her own name as she bent over him.

How much easier we find it to say for *thy sake*, with fervent sincerity, to a fellow-mortal, than to say those same words in like manner to God! Hilda's eyes beamed with infinite tenderness, as she murmured that she could sacrifice all for that boy's sake and her father's. It is well that we may believe that when Christ tells us he accepts, as offered to himself, the cup of cold water given to one of his little ones, he teaches us that God accepts, as proofs of love to Him, deeds of self-sacrifice for our fellow-mortals, His children!





CHAPTER II.

MR. MEYNARD'S was a long homeward walk ; he chose the longer of the two ways—perhaps wishing to delay meeting his mother's eyes. When he left Hilda, he went down the lane, through the scattered village, along the road that wound circuitously by the side of the lake ; then crossing a rustic bridge over the mouth of a little river, he sauntered slowly through his own fields, the only hay-fields for miles round.

The night was passing fair ; the fragrance of the new-mown hay went as “incense o'er the land ;” profound quiet reigned ; the murmur of the stream was the voice of the silence.

Nature laid her cool, kind hand on Mr. Meynard's brow and heart ; he grew calmer ; his thoughts of Hilda became more just and gentle. His face had assumed its best expression when he reached the Hall—of course, home-influences would soothe him yet more.

There was an air of confusion about the house, even the lawn before the drawing-room windows was littered

with straw and packing cases: the large room Mr. Meynard entered looked cheerless, pictures were gone from the walls, all its usual ornaments had disappeared. A lady set at a table, upon which the one lamp stood, looking over papers; she glanced up sharply as Mr. Meynard came in, but resumed her occupation without speaking.

The young man threw himself into a chair, sat listlessly watching his mother's quick movements, all repose passing from his face. Tiring of his first position, and of the unbroken silence, he went to the window and complained of the heat.

"I find it quite cold," Mrs. Meynard remarked, with a shiver.

"Are you ever warm—too warm?" Mr. Meynard asked.

He turned, paced the room, finally stretched himself upon a sofa.

"You seem restless, to-night," his mother observed.

Mr. Meynard shifted his head on the pillow, but made no reply. The lady covertly watched him, as she pursued her employment. Mother and son were wonderfully alike. The gentleman's profile was sharply relieved by a dark curtain behind him; his brown hair, neither dark, nor bright, pushed back, showed a white, delicately-cut, but somewhat contracted brow; all his features were small, and of a womanly refinement of detail, yet there was no softness about his face; the eyes, light and large, lacked depth; it was hard to read the expression of the mouth; a curious mingling of haughty consciousness, and of weak distrust, kept it ever changing. It was altogether a provoking face; wanting an impalpable something which might have given it a saintly kind of beauty.

Mrs. Meynard's features were rather more marked than her son's, but as justly chiselled; they seemed to have frozen, when wearing their least pleasing aspect, never to have known more than a surface thawing since.

Mr. Meynard was not long left in such peace as his own thoughts allowed him. A dark, handsome girl came through the folding-doors from an adjoining room where she had been "sorting" music. Rising hastily, she had thrown some books from her lap to the floor, making no slight noise; she entered the room with anything but the quietness of a conventional young lady; and the quick blood flew to her cheek as Mrs. Meynard icily reproved her.

She went up to her brother's sofa, stood looking at him with an air of half-sarcastic pity, then said—

"Well, Hendon, you might find something better to do, than to lounge on that sofa and look interesting, considering that you have been enjoying yourself while we have been working ourselves to death; but, perhaps, you are tired, poor old fellow!" she added, kindly, "and not merry, I dare say."

"Do not talk so loud, Anna; you had better resume your occupation, it is late," Mrs. Meynard said.

But her son caught the girl's hand and drew her down to him saying,

"Rattle away, Anna! it is quite rousing to have you among us—I am sure you don't stand in need of any assistance, though, you have energy enough for us both."

"But I hated having to stay in the house to-night. If you won't come and help me now I'll tell Hilda, to-

morrow, how disobliging you were when you came home —perhaps she has been scolding you."

"For my part," interposed a tall girl, with "a clear and cold-cut face," who came gliding in, "I think Miss Stanton does that pretty frequently: no doubt, thinking herself more competent to form Hendon's mind and manners than his own mother and sisters are."

"Even if she does think so—but I am sure she doesn't," Anna began with a tone and look of defiance, but she paused and then added, more temperately, "I only mean that Hilda is a perfect lady—that she is as fit—" another pause.

"I don't know, of course, what your idea of a lady may be," Miss Meynard returned, with languid scorn, "I own she is well enough for a country parson's daughter. She has a temper of her own, though, I fancy, in spite of her gentle manners; I have seen a queer look in her eyes sometimes. Well! I hope poor Hendon won't find it to his cost some day!" she added, with an elaborate sigh.

"What *do* you mean by speaking so, Amelia?" her sister exclaimed indignantly. "You lose no opportunity of talking slightly of Hilda, and of pretending to pity Hendon, as if he were some poor boy entrapped by a designing woman."

"Such may be more the case than you imagine," the elder girl replied, calmly, adjusting her hair at the glass. "Hendon was very young when the engagement was formed; I have always heard Miss Stanton spoken of as old for her years and as possessing great strength of character!"

"Girls! no more of this," Mrs. Meynard interposed,

“remember that your brother is present ; however much you may naturally regret his entanglement, Amelia, you must speak of Miss Stanton with respect.”

“Of course, mamma, but Anna is too provoking ; she makes a heroine—a piece of perfection—of Miss Stanton. It is absurd !”

Amelia, seating herself, took up a book ; but Anna could not let the matter rest there.

“Mamma reminds us of a fact that Hendon seems strangely to have forgotten,” she said, flashing a glance towards the sofa, “that he is present. If I were a man, would I lie quiet to hear the woman I hoped to call my wife spoken of so ?”

“Keep your Irish eloquence for a more fitting opportunity of display, Anna,” Mrs. Meynard said ; but her son sprang up, exclaiming—

“Anna is quite right—Amelia, you are intolerable—you provoke me to tell you what I meant to keep to myself—the noble girl of whom you, a worldly woman, dare speak slightly, has done her part towards breaking off our engagement. How much your conduct towards her, mother, and yours, my sweet sister, may have influenced her decision, I cannot tell.”

Mrs. Meynard dropped the papers she held ; a most unwonted flush came into her face ; it quickly passed, and she said, in her unmoved tone—

“You know, Hendon, that I never approved your choice, but I have always treated Hilda with respect and consideration.”

“Poor warm-hearted Hilda !” Anna muttered.

“Miss Stanton has broken off the engagement !” Amelia

said, incredulously. "If it is anything more than a ruse, to redouble your ardour—"

"What reason does she give?" the mother asked.

Mr. Meynard repeated what he thought fit of his conversation with Hilda, not heeding sundry characteristic comments.

"Miss Stanton may at last turn her talents to profit as a governess,—or an authoress," Amelia suggested.

"You must now see, Hendon, the absolute necessity of this unfortunate connection being at an end; of course, you accepted the freedom so properly offered you," Mrs. Meynard said.

Anna looked at her brother; her full upper lip curling disdainfully. He stood leaning both hands on the table, smiling slightly, his eyes fixed on his mother's face, his slight frame shaken by emotion—

"You are much mistaken in me, Mrs. Meynard," he returned. "I do not intend releasing Hilda from her promise to be my wife. I have told her so."

Anna took his hand and looked up at him proudly, Mrs. Meynard and Amelia, remained politely silent, the latter wearing a significant sneer on her mouth; her brother turned to her and said, with a tone of quiet authority—

"I *require* of you, Amelia, that, for the future, you speak courteously of Miss Stanton, at least, in my presence."

Miss Meynard, irritated by this peremptory tone in a younger brother, rose, and made a sweeping curtsey, saying—

"You think this all very grand and heroic, I daresay;

it is quite too much so for my simple understanding. I shall wish you goodnight."

With another curtsey, Miss Meynard left the room.

Anna followed before long, after having given her brother a hearty embrace.

Mrs. Meynard continued her occupation, preserving an unbroken silence.

"How much Anna resembles my father," Mr. Meynard said, after a long pacing of the room. "It is strange that Anna and poor Hartley, the youngest and eldest, should be so different from the rest of us."

This remark, elicited no answer. Mrs. Meynard's mouth was a trifle more firmly compressed, her movements were a little more sharp and jerking.

At last, she had apparently finished the task she had set herself. She shut her desk, making the lock click noisily; then, folding her hands resolutely, settling them on the table before her, she spoke—

"Be so kind as to give me your attention for a few moments. Hendon, take that seat," pointing to one opposite her own, as Mr. Meynard obeyed; an old feeling of powerlessness before those cold eyes came over him as he did so, but he struggled against it.

By a few cleverly put questions, his mother obtained all further information she wished as to what had passed between him and Hilda.

"You parted in anger, it seems, then?" she concluded.

"I was angry," Mr. Meynard, replied—"she was calm and queenly, and——"

"No raptures, if you please," Mrs. Meynard interrupted. "Now I know all the circumstances, I shall be able to advise you."

“Thank you, but I do not need advice,” the young man said, rising hastily. “My mind is made up—my course of duty clear.”

“Do not deceive yourself by talking about duty—calling cowardice and self-indulgence by that name,” his mother said, scornfully.

“Mother!” Mr. Meynard exclaimed, resuming his seat and speaking earnestly, “you strangely forget some things! Was it not almost the last request of my dead father that you would be a mother to *her*?”

A grey paleness came over Mrs. Meynard’s face; then it flushed as if with pain; she paused a moment before she could say, in a steady voice—

“I am in no danger of forgetting what I should remember; if your father, cherishing a memory, it would have been more to his honour to crush, weakly preferred that girl before his own children, it is the less to be expected that *I* should do so. But this is not the matter in question. Hendon! I know you thoroughly—mark my words! I tell you that if you renew this broken engagement, you will live to repent of that step. All I ask of you is this—do nothing hastily—wait, have time to consider, and let things take their course. Gain a little knowledge of life—mix with women of style and fashion, and compare this rustic beauty with them.”

“‘Women of fashion!’—the very phrase is odious!”

“Ah! it shocks your poetical ideas of unsophisticated innocence, ‘beauty unadorned,’ and so on. Indeed, Hendon, they don’t wear well in the work-a-day world, these pretty Arcadian fancies! If you could have been a

poet, had one grain of genius, it would be different : all that was boyish nonsense ;—did even Hilda encourage you ? Believe me, you have something better, more enduring and serviceable than genius. Hartley had all that—*you* are my son. Genius stands in the way of worldly success—it kept your father from taking his proper place in the world—it would have done the same to poor Hartley. You have tact—are clever enough—are so constituted that you can and will rise. You will do credit to the family, make our name more known and more honourable, and will secure—but I forget,” she broke off abruptly, “you give up all chance of this, are determined to sink instead of rising, all to prove your constancy to a woman, who will tire of it, and you—but I see you are weary of my presence—perhaps, you are going to write a passionate appeal to your mistress. Well! good night; only again mark my words! you will repent it if you renew this broken engagement !”

Mr. Meynard opened the door, and his mother rustled out without further word or look, leaving a poison rankling in his heart.

It was only when he felt quite sure that everyone had retired for the night, and that he was secure from interruption, that he ventured to open a writing-table. He took out paper and laid it ready, cut up some half dozen pens, then, at last, began a letter.

But his love seemed ice-bound ; he wrote only to blot out. The bitter cold frost-wind of worldliness, had blown across his spirit. After sitting thinking a long time, he rose impatiently and paced the echoing room, working himself into a fever of confused feeling.

His thoughts were all of the future ; he moved through many scenes of achievement, and success, the central figure, seeking no sympathy from any sweet, starry eyes.

A very simple thing changed the complexion of his meditation. A little book fell from off the top of a pile, upon the floor ; he stooped to replace it, it was a volume of poems Hilda had given him ; it lay open where she had written his name. As he turned over the leaves, recalling where they had read that passage, what Hilda had said about this, how another had spoken to them so plainly of Hartley, Mr. Meynard might well believe in the quality of being, comparing just-passed thoughts with those now flooding his soul.

In this changed mood he took up his pen—he could write now. It was close upon daybreak when he raised up a beaming face, having covered much paper with very fervent words ; the chirp of a new-awakened bird struck on his ear as hopeful music, he threw open a window to let in the fair dawn.





CHAPTER III.

FATER that morning Hilda sat by the window of the Parsonage breakfast-parlour, waiting for her father. She and Ernest had been in the garden and the fresh air had brought the usual tinge of colour back to her cheek. She would have made a pretty picture, sitting in the dark panelled room, bright light falling full upon the brown, bent head and the broad white brow, on the pure light-hued morning-dress she wore, and the rich red rose, Ernest's gift, fastened into it.

Mr. Stanton, a grave, grey man of stately presence, stood still a moment in the open door-way before he disturbed the young student.

Hilda must have felt his look, for she lifted her head before he had stirred: a deep blush swept across her face as she went to meet him; she somewhat hastily turned from his embrace, then sat down to the breakfast-table looking paler than before.

She chanced to say—"you must be tired, Papa, it was almost day-light when you came home."

His answer and his look troubled her again a little;

her father turned to the window, enquired for Ernest, and Hilda going to seek him, met him at the door.

“A servant from the Hall has just brought this for you, Hilda,” he said, giving her a letter, “I met him at the gate.”

Hilda laid the letter down beside her unopened: she poured out the tea with so shaky a hand that Mr. Stanton said he would cut his own bread-and-butter that morning; but after a while he questioned—“Your letter, Hilda?” and she opened and read it.

Her cheek flushed and paled as she did so, she laid it down before her because she could not read it while it was held by her trembling hands, tears came into her eyes. When she had finished she gave it into her father’s extended hand, it was the first of her love-letters he had ever wished to read, and watched his face eagerly.

A sarcastic elevation of the eye-brow as he went on, a faint sad smile when he laid it down, would have been a death-warrant for hope, had she entertained hope.

“These are words, child, words—there is none of the calm strength of resolution in anything here—you are a good, brave girl and must be firm”—

“And this should remain unanswered?”

“Ay! unless *I* write a line: my Hilda must not flutter about the destructive flame like a weak bedazzled moth.”

“It is past,” Hilda said, softly; “I must find stern satisfaction in saying ‘the end.’”

“We must be more to each other, child. I have been self-engrossed—shall be more at ease now. You children are all to me. Cannot I and this boy be enough for you, Hilda?”

Hilda could not speak; she stretched out her hand, and it was grasped firm and close, Mr. Stanton repeating “My brave girl !”

Ernest had looked comprehendingly from one to the other; now he said, “I know why Hilda looked pale and sorry last night. Shall I ever be brave, papa—brave enough to be a soldier fit to join the army of martyrs ?”

“Martyrs ! Who has been talking about martyrs—has Hilda ?” Mr. Stanton asked sharply.

“I asked her to, last night.”

“Does she think she could be one ?”

“She said she didn’t know, that I must talk to you.”

“Oh ! Well, I dare say your idea of ‘a pale martyr in his shirt of fire,’ is a rather striking contrast to this young lady of quiet aspect, your sister, with her soft raiment and braided hair—eh ? Enough of this. You want to be brave—take heart of grace, then, boy ; if you are good enough, you’ll be brave enough. Now, be off, and I’ll call you when I want you in the study.”

Mr. Stanton lingered in the breakfast-room long after his usual hour that morning. He walked up and down, and took no notice of Hilda ; she sat down to work, waiting lest he should want her. Plying her needle busily, her thoughts grew so intent on one matter that she started when, at last, her father stopped before her and said abruptly—

“Put down your work. I want to be listened to.”

Hilda obeyed ; there was trouble and pain in the eyes she raised to his face. He noted it, kissed her forehead, and said—

“We must be patient with each other, child. We

shall have some things to bear ; I fear the burden may press heavily on you." A pause, and then he asked, "Have you any plans for the future, Hilda ?"

Hilda answered, confusedly—"There has been so little time—changes have come so rapidly."

"True ; you know we must leave this place soon ?"

"Yes, papa."

"That we shall be poor, comparatively, if not positively ?"

"Yes."

"That, being poor, we shall have toils and troubles unknown before ?"

"I suppose we shall."

"That we must want some things, work for others ?"

"Yes papa."

"Child ! I want to stir you from that calm acquiescence—to set you thinking of the future instead of the past. Do you remember that Ernest's prospects will be changed, blighted ?"

"Changed, not blighted, papa. If blight falls anywhere, it must not fall on him."

"On whom then ? I do not care for any of these things for myself. I am an old tree, rotten and unsound ; day and night my scathed branches cry 'how long must I cumber the earth ?'"

"Oh ! papa, papa !"—but the tears gathering to Hilda's eyes were not allowed to fall ; she went on quickly, "We shall all feel a change, but blight need fall nowhere. Dear papa ! I understand why you are making the worst of things. You are right ; I shall be roused. If I have work to do I shall feel that no hardship. Do you

remember how, when I was very young, before—before I was engaged, I fretted about the uselessness of my life—called its quiet, stagnation—longed for storm and change ?”

“ Perchance you ‘reap the misery of a granted prayer ?’ ”

“ Not the misery ; change came then, was wrought in me—my whole nature was stirred ; then followed a calm of satisfaction which I thought would be lasting.”

“ Ay ! Hendon was under his father’s influence then,” Mr. Stanton said, half to himself. “ Now—”

“ I do not say *he* altered, papa, but I did—perhaps it was the restlessness of my nature that broke up my charmed peace. Doubts, not of him, have thronged thickly upon me of late—I have not been happy. Now I see how good it was for me, though hard, to have that calm so ruffled that I might see its shallowness, and strive after a deeper, better peace.”

“ Right, daughter ! Learn to see the hand of God in all things—feel all events His providences—trust with the *quiet* of a firm reliance—live out your faith—beware of exhausting it in throbs of feverish excitement.”

“ Papa, I am beginning at the beginning in many ways—be patient with me.”

“ Patient ! But I am not always, am I?—so show myself but a little way advanced along the road, I have tried to lead others.”

“ I do not like you to speak so,” Hilda said, with tearful eyes.

“ Well, daughter, now again, my question—Evade it no longer ; have you any plans for the future ?”

Unconsciously Hilda resumed her work ; her father

caught it away, and lifted up her drooped head ; he read an answer to his question in her kindled face.

“I change my question to *what* are your plans ? Tell me them boldly. You don’t think of taking in sewing, I suppose—though your perseverance with this countenances the idea ?”

“Would you like me to do so ?” Hilda asked, adding, demurely—“You know it would be a most decidedly ‘feminine’ calling.”

“No joking, young lady ! Do you mean to teach children at twopence a week, then ? You shake your head—you can’t go out as a governess. I shall guess no more : the catalogue of ways and means for women to earn a livelihood is but short.”

“You have sometimes spoken so disparagingly of the way in which I hope—fancy—that I may do something that —”

“Courage !—I won’t be terrible.”

“Do you remember the reception you gave some of my early attempts to write—poetry and prose sketches ?”

“The murder is out !—I don’t remember, though.”

“I put them on your desk ; while you read I didn’t dare look, but sat by flushing and trembling.”

“Well ?”

“When you had finished, you looked up with your dreadful smile and said—‘You think them fine, child—feel the fire of genius burning within you ; they are very well for a little girl ; but, my advice is, drop the pen and stick to your needle.’”

“Was I so harsh ?”

“That is what you said. That night I walked up and

down my room for hours—full of mortification and resentment; it was wholesome, but severe discipline. Not many months after I went to stay at the Hall—during the summer vacation—child as you thought me, I was treated as a woman—an effectual diversion of thought was effected; but now —”

A sudden sense of loss, smote the brave spirit. Hilda's face was hidden for a moment.

Mr. Stanton turned quickly away, biting his lower lip. After all, had he done right in encouraging the sacrifice his child had made? Had he not in over-wiseness tried to intermeddle with God's appointment?

Such questioning was pleasantly interrupted by Hilda's clear voice, asking—

“Well, papa, have I shocked you by the hints I have thrown out? Are you very angry with a daring girl who proposes to over-step that misty, mystic boundary, ‘woman's sphere,’ armed with the pen, as well as the needle?”

“At all events, your motives shall have my warm approbation; but, child, I shall not like to see those fingers stained with ink!”

“I hope I may be able to keep my hands clean, papa! as to those literary ladies to whom, I think, you owe your prejudice against the tribe, were they not learned, scientific, mathematically-inclined beings? I don't mean to ridicule such, I heartily believe they may also be good and useful, but they are as terrible to me, as to you. Is there the slightest fear or hope of my becoming one of that genus?”

Mr. Stanton laughingly said—

“Indeed, no! if I ever felt alarmed for the intellectual supremacy of the nobler sex, your dullness in some matters reassured me. Yet, at one time, you had a keen relish for works on mental philosophy, theology, physiology, and that sort of thing.”

“There is the mystery of infinity, giving the charm of romance to such studies—that mania was useful to me, papa.”

“Perhaps so; something has given solidity to your character; yet, at one time, imagination threatened to gain undue preponderance, perhaps it was my fear for you, on that score, that made me so harsh in my reception of your youthful efforts.”

“You were only content when you saw me sitting at work, but I have smiled since, remembering how threads of fancy were woven into woofs of romance, while I plied my needle diligently. Long mornings spent over some purely mechanical task, cultivated my dreamy habits more than the reading of the wildest romances would have done.”

“That is your opinion, daughter!”

“The fruit of my experience, papa.”

“You are right, I dare say, as to your individual case. I think I dimly suspected this sometimes marking the dreamy eyes upraised at my sudden entrance. Poor child! you wanted a mother’s care. Well, Hilda, I sanction your endeavour; if you have anything to say, say it.”

Hilda looked up with a bright expression of gratitude. Mr. Stanton went on, dejectedly—

“I grieve that it is the expectation of necessity for

exertion that revives these old aspirations; whatever our position may be, you must not, shall not, work to weariness."

Marking the glowing look which consciousness of power set on Hilda's face, he added, more cheerfully—

"After all, it will be pleasant for us to be working in the same manner; we shall grow to understand each other better day by day. In spite of my ridicule, I don't suppose you have quite left off writing down your thoughts; fetch me some of your scraps."

Hilda obeyed and quietly awaited the result of her father's grave perusal, calm now from the absence of desire of self-glorification.

"These promise well," Mr. Stanton pronounced; "there is an absence of mannerism, no redundancy of words—the power of simplicity. Your thoughts are not smothered up, but clothed enough for purposes of artistic grace. But, Hilda, one thing more, while we are on this subject: for God's sake—and don't be shocked at my strong speaking—think of your literary pursuits only as a means, never as an end—be the woman, not the authoress. Any striving after name and fame, *for their own sakes*, must end in misery."

Hilda looked somewhat perplexed; her father went on—

"Of course, you must have an artist's delight in your work—must not carry it on in an indifferent or mercenary spirit; but there is no danger of that, the artistic element in you will not need *conscious* culture. It *may* require effort to keep yourself merely and simply a woman; not to spoil the pure fountain of love and life by troubling its waters with groping and searching."

“Forgive me, papa, but I think you do not quite understand—do not know how small a part of our nature is left for anything but love—for love’s sake all deeds *dared* by women are done.”

“Well! well! only if an hour of triumphant success comes.”

“I fancy any such hour would come attended by bitterness enough to keep the spirit sober, very humble; with the crown will come the cross—a woman wins fame at the peril of happiness.”

“Hesitate then, child, to attain it, or run the risk of having it thrust upon you.” He turned back from the door to say this very earnestly.

“I do not hesitate; not so much because I am very brave as because—” Hilda faltered—her father understood and said—

“God bless and prosper you in every way.”

“One phase of life is turned from me for ever” was what would have followed her “because.”





CHAPTER IV.

MR. STANTON did not go—instead, he sank into his easy chair, sat gazing out over his sunny garden, a weary look coming over his face: it brightened presently as he said—

“Ernest is ushering Anna Meynard up the garden: I am glad the poor child has come alone, I will just stay and speak to her, then leave you together.”

Anna's impetuous walk was subdued into a lingering pace this warm morning; she entered the room timidly, glancing shyly at Hilda from under her black lashes.

“How fares it with you, my winsome lady?” Mr. Stanton said rising to meet her. “When do you leave us, Anna?”

Anna gave Hilda a very warm embrace, then answered, with eyes too tearful to be lifted up, that they were going to-morrow.

“And how will they manage to make a fine lady of you, Miss Anna? How will you relish a walk round the squares, or a demure canter in the park?”

"It will soon kill me and that is my consolation." Anna answered with an air of grave conviction.

"Young lives do not fail so easily. You thought it would kill you to leave Ireland and your friends there."

"It would have done if it hadn't been for you, and Hilda, and dear Ernest, and if Wynndale hadn't been so lovely and Hendon very kind,"

"Some saving 'if' you may look for in your future with sure confidence."

"You will make new friends, Anna," Hilda suggested.

"I will not make new friends," was the impetuous answer.

"Will you refuse any blessings offered you because you can't keep just what you please, silly child?" Mr. Stanton asked.

"But it is so hard that directly I love people I should have to leave them. Isn't it wise not to love any more?"

"Easier said than done. Anna, my child, let me preach in private a little for once: you must learn to think of all 'hard' things as going to make up the discipline of life, as ordained to work together for your good. You must be more and less dependant — less dependant on human affection because leaning more on One above. I won't go on, for I daresay my words sound cold and hard; yet I love you, Anna! I leave you with Hilda now, I shall see you again. Come, Ernest, and let us be as industrious as this hot morning makes us long to be idle."

When the door closed behind Mr. Stanton, Anna threw herself down on the floor by Hilda, burying her face in her friend's lap.

"Hilda ! Hilda ! I cannot bear it !" she sobbed out.

"What is the matter, dear ?"

"Everything ! Everything is false and wrong ! I was ashamed to come here to-day ; I should not have wondered or been angry if you had refused to see me."

"My dear child !" Hilda said soothingly, passing her hand caressingly over the disordered black hair.

"You look astonished, reproachful—Hilda, you can't think how I love you, and it is so hard to stand alone doing battle for you day by day."

"You have not stood alone—quite alone ?"

"I know what you mean—but generally they don't speak of you when Hendon's by ; even when he is, though, he doesn't notice many trifles that hurt me. He isn't easily roused, you know, but last night he spoke out bravely."

"I am glad he defended me then—it was generous, for we parted in anger."

"Generous !" Anna echoed, scornfully, "it was the commonest justice. Don't be angry, dear, dear Hilda, but do you know that if I felt sure you would soon forget —wouldn't suffer much—I should be glad for this engagement to be broken off, though—"

"He told you of what passed last night, then ?" Hilda heeded only that.

"He was provoked into doing so by Amelia. But, remember, he doesn't agree to it a bit—he told mamma so distinctly ; he does love you, though he is not good—not grand enough for you."

"I don't want to hear about that," Hilda said, hastily ; "but I must have you understand, and hope you will try

and make Hendon believe, that I am serious—that I am not playing with my happiness or his, but have decided once for all."

"And you will never be my sister?" Anna murmured, mournfully.

"Always at heart."

Anna's head rested quietly on Hilda's knee a little; soon, she sprang up, pushed her hair back from her flushed face, leant out of the window, looking round with an intense gaze, then confronted Hilda, saying, almost fiercely—

"But what am I—poor I—to do? Give me some talisman to make my coming life endurable! You can do hard things as if they were easy—teach me to. Don't look so calmly compassionate, you beautiful Hilda, but tell me, what *must* I do?"

"You will think me stony-hearted if I tell you what you ought to do?"

"I won't."

"I think, dear Anna, what you *have* to do is to bring your heart into your home—turn it towards your mother, and —"

"My mother does not love me!" Anna said, lowly, distinctly.

"She does, dear," was answered confidently; "you are so different, it is difficult for you to understand each other; and Mrs. Meynard thinks it is her duty to tame you; but she does love you. You have let her see so plainly, too, that your heart is not her's,—make her feel that you love her, you will soon come to know that she loves you."

"Hilda! look at me, straight in the face, tell me, would

you like me to resemble Amelia, or my London sister, Adelaide ? mamma can love them ! ”

“ I should not ! ”

“ That is right ; if you hadn’t given me a straightforward answer, I shouldn’t have trusted you, as I can now.”

“ Do you think yourself better than your sisters, Anna ? ”

“ I am at least more what God made me.” That was true, Hilda felt it so.

Hilda rose, saying, they would have a stroll in the shady garden-walk ; they went out, found a deliciously cool spot in the orchard, and sat there talking. Without any preaching, just by speaking out of a true heart, that was learning many things, Hilda found much to say that, remembered long after, served to calm and console her impetuous friend.

Late that afternoon, Mrs. and Miss Meynard drove over, to pay their leave-taking visit.

Hilda had generally felt ill at ease in Mrs. Meynard’s presence, from anxiety to conciliate Hendon’s mother, consciousness that she did not succeed. To-day she was outwardly calm, though her heart rose up against the proud woman who came rustling in, clothed in the trappings of a woe that had failed to soften her heart. The dignity of the young girl’s manner, was a source of wonder to Mrs. Meynard ; it exacted her reluctant admiration, and compelled from her more courtesy than she often showed to those not honoured by her preference ; at the same time it quieted any remorse that might have troubled her. She talked to Hilda in the “ friendly ” manner she knew well how to assume. Miss Meynard meanwhile remained silent and surveyed Hilda with cold curiosity ;

hating the monotony of country-life, she had passed very little time at Wynndale since an elder sister's marriage, and so had seen very little of her brother's betrothed.

Spite of Mrs. Meynard's glib small-talk and skilful avoidance of dangerous topics, the interview was awkward; the elder lady did not feel comfortable when the clear eyes of the younger rested on her face. It was a relief, when Mrs. Meynard expressing a wish to see Mr. Stanton alone, Hilda went to inquire if he were disengaged. She crossed the large room with slow, stately dignity, because she felt sick and exhausted, and feared her feet might falter; Mrs. Meynard's glance followed her from the room, then she turned and said to Amelia—

“That girl's manner is wonderfully improved! I never saw so young a person more thoroughly self-possessed. I thought we might possibly have a painful scene. I wonder if Hendon wrote to her last night, if she is inwardly triumphing over us.”

“Either that, or she is tired of him; has some new string to her bow, possibly.”

“My father is disengaged, Mrs. Meynard, will you come to his study?” Hilda said, giving Amelia a steady look, before which her scornful eyes fell, speaking in a clear, rather loud, voice.

Mrs. Meynard rose; had she ever blushed she would certainly have done so as she followed Hilda. She had need of all her icy assurances when left alone with Mr. Stanton, who received her with very forced and formal politeness: his first remark was—

“It is long since I, or my daughter, have had the honour of a visit from you, madam.”

“And this is a farewell visit,” the lady replied, briskly.

“So I presumed.”

“My son regretted not having seen you last night.”

“Perhaps, your son does not regard *his* as a final departure from Wynndale?” Mr. Stanton said—not without malicious intent.

“Have you any reason for thinking so?” was asked, sharply.

“Every reason his protestations can give us.”

“But—your daughter—no doubt she told you?”

“That she had done her part towards breaking the engagement with your son?—I am aware of it.”

“She acted by your advice, I presume?”

“Hardly, I merely enabled her to see her position clearly, and left the rest to her sound judgment.”

“She acted very properly, I must say.”

“She is fortunate in securing your approbation.”

“What you say about enabling her to see her position clearly reminds me of what I want to talk to you about.”

Mr. Stanton bowed, and looked all attention.

“First, then, I must speak to you frankly, as a mother. Of course I am aware, that just now, all at once, my son cannot reconcile himself to the rupture of——”

“Long-formed ties,” Mr. Stanton suggested, and added; “doubtless you hope that change, intercourse with the world, may enable him to do so.”

“I do not deny entertaining the hope that a little knowledge of real life will help him to rid himself of some of his romantic ideas.”

“Excuse me! let me understand you, ‘real life,’ means with you the ‘social’ life, as led by people of fashion;

as 'romantic ideas,' you designate high-flown notions, about love and constancy, which young people are apt to entertain?"

"I am sure you understand me," was answered hurriedly. "Now, what I want to ascertain is this—does your daughter hold her decision irrevocable? Should you allow her to alter it, if she should be importuned to do so?"

"My daughter, actuated by a sense of duty, made a great sacrifice when she gave up your son. She will be steadfast, unless her idea of duty alters. For my part, I should regret to see this broken engagement patched up, believing it would cause my child much heart-wearing anxiety. I could not *now* confidently trust her happiness to Hendon's keeping."

"Exactly!—it would occasion Hilda much anxiety," Mrs. Meynard agreed, eagerly. "I am glad you take so wise a view of the matter—glad we agree in thinking these young people should be kept apart."

"I said nothing about their being *kept* apart. I trust Hilda implicitly."

"Well, well! but we do agree on the main point. That settled, now, Mr. Stanton, let me use the privilege of an old friend—inquire into the truth of a report that you are about to give up this living, leave the Church!"

"You would have received my formal resignation this evening."

"Impossible! I did *not* believe *this* of you. You must feel that I speak disinterestedly, for it would be a decided advantage to Hendon that the living should return into our gift; but, in your position, as regards years, fortune,

health, such an action seems the dictation of sheer madness!"

"Mad, then, I must remain in your eyes."

"You are a Christian, still, I suppose, Mr. Stanton?"

"I hope so, madam."

"I am sure that is all these Wynndale folks require of you. You may preach what doctrine you like in this out-of-the-world place. Now, if you were located in a town, among a set of critical people, it might be prudent to resign if you couldn't continue orthodox. What shall you do? You won't gain any sympathy or aid; it's a move in the wrong direction for that; those poor plebeian Dissenters can't help you. What will you gain?"

Mr. Stanton's face had been kindling from its weariness during the last few moments, now he answered—

"What do I expect to gain?—Peace, madam—peace of the kind that is not of the world's giving or taking away! Do you chance to remember some strange, old-fashioned words that ask, 'What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?'"

"There is no question either of worlds or souls, Mr. Stanton. I must say that it seems to me strange Christianity, that should lead you to sacrifice the prospects of your son and daughter to the gratification of a whim."

"I might answer you again in words from the same source."

"As you are resolved," the lady interrupted, "to lower your whole position in this strange uncalled-for way, I cannot but rejoice that the connection between our families is at an end."

“Before it is quite at an end, let me in my turn avail myself of that same plea of ‘old friendship,’ to say a few plain words.” Mr. Stanton held the hand, offered him in leave-taking, firmly, while he said—

“Beware of worshipping the idols of the world, Mrs. Meynard. Remember, you cannot serve God and mammon—that the very day in which you bid your soul take pleasure in the result of successful scheming, in amassed worldly goods, that soul may be required of you, called to go out into that far country from whose bourn no traveller can return. There is no marrying, or giving in marriage; it will avail you nothing if your son has allied himself grandly, even with the princes of the earth—nothing if your daughters, by treading underfoot their holiest affections and aspirations, have risen to the high places of the world—these things will avail you nothing in the great and terrible day of the Lord.”

The poor lady’s heart quailed somewhat before Mr. Stanton’s looks and words; but her voice was steady, though her smile somewhat sickly, as she replied—

“No doubt you mean well, my good sir, but you have an exaggerated, distempered way of looking at things.” Slightly shrugging her shoulders, she left the room, Mr. Stanton following her.

Hilda, looking up quickly when they entered the drawing-room, was pained by the look of exhaustion on her father’s face.

“How long you have been mamma!” Miss Meynard exclaimed, rousing herself from languid indifference to sudden animation, partly from fear of Mr. Stanton.

"I am ready now; where is Anna?" Mrs. Meynard asked.

"In the garden with Ernest, I think."

Mrs. Meynard proposed that they should all take a turn round the grounds, and Anna was found and captured, but Mr. Stanton found opportunity to say to her—

"If you ever stand in need of a true friend, Anna, think of me—in any strait I will help you to the best of my power. You shall know our address when we move, though no correspondence must be kept up. God bless you, child, be good and true, and He will."

Anna kissed Mr. Stanton's hand passionately, not heeding if any one saw this extravagant demonstration of loving admiration.

They were at the gate; final farewells were exchanged. Mrs. Meynard's fingers extended to Hilda and her father. Clever as she was, Mrs. Meynard could not shake hands; the assumed friendliness of her manner was always contradicted by the repellant gesture she so designated. Anna clung to Hilda, till Mr. Stanton took her hand and led her to the carriage, where her mother and sister, already seated, waited for her impatiently.

When it had disappeared, Mr. Stanton gave a sigh of relief, saying—

"They are gone now! That is over."

"Poor Anna!" Hilda said, "We must not lose sight of her."

"It will be long before she leads a quiet life; I trust she may not weary herself out before any true crisis comes."

"I am to pick a nosegay to-morrow morning, and throw it into the carriage at the cross-roads," Ernest said; he was manfully struggling with his grief at losing a dear play-fellow.





CHAPTER V.

NE morning, soon after the departure of the Meynards, Hilda sat alone in the breakfast-room, looking over her account of family expenditure. Her brow was knit in perplexed thought, as she pondered the urgent need for economy—wondered where she must begin to practice it; her eyes wandering from the figures to look out over the landscape glowing in midsummer heat, she saw a gentleman languidly lounging up the gravel sweep, casting scrutinizing glances towards the old, many-gabled house.

A few moments after, a servant brought her a card. She had hardly had time to read on it the name of the Rev. Raynton Augustus Larne, when the gentleman she had seen from the window entered the room.

Hilda, repelled by his assured address, greeted him as icily as Mrs. Meynard might have done, desired that the card should be taken to her father, and very slightly intimated that he might be seated. Apparently, perfectly at his ease, he approached the window and began to talk

fluently, though with a slight drawl, of the beauty of the prospect and the heat of the weather.

This Mr. Larne was a very handsome man—tall, and with what novelists call an aristocratic cast of features: his mouth was, certainly, curved by an habitual sneer, but the sneer showed a perfect set of teeth as well as a smile could have done; the contrast between the bloodless hue of his complexion, and the darkness of his eyes and hair, was strikingly “interesting.” He was a man accustomed to admiration, clever enough most frequently to despise those who lavished it upon him, often giving a neat, sharp-cutting sarcasm in exchange for a compliment. Hilda, fancying after a time what his business might be, could not wholly restrain a smile as she wondered what the poor Wynndale people would think of her father’s successor; but the smile was a swift and a sad one. She was very glad when Mr. Stanton made his appearance; a slight elevation of his quizzical eyebrows told her how similar his thoughts about their guest were to her own. He had been prepared for Mr. Larne’s appearance, but had forgotten to mention the subject to Hilda. Her gravity was seriously endangered when her father, willfully misunderstanding a question about the “families” in the neighbourhood, replied by particularly recommending to Mr. Larne’s notice those of John Hodge, fisherman, Widow Holtham, Elihu Stubbs and some others of like plebeian calling. But Mr. Stanton added, seriously, that among the people of the surrounding hill-district, there were many honest, brave, God-fearing souls, from intercourse with whom he had often been the gainer.

Mr. Larne bit his lip; he did not know whether to

ridicule Mr. Stanton's simplicity, or resent his sarcasm ; Hilda having a true lady's distaste for seeing anyone placed in an embarrassing position, came to his relief, by remarking that it was a thinly populated district, only boasting a very few families of distinction.

"And of these few, you have lost one—the Meynards. Was not Hendon Meynard, a school-fellow of mine once, engaged to some young lady of this neighbourhood ? Soon after I left college he used to write me glowing accounts of some fair and nameless divinity, and I, being some years older, and not, at any time, at all romantic, was much amused with his raptures. Has the affair been broken off?"

Mr. Stanton desired Hilda to go and order lunch, then, when she had left the room, said, simply—

"My daughter, Sir, *was* engaged to Mr. Meynard."

Mr. Larne had seldom felt so discomposed as after hearing those few words—he had certainly signally failed in making a favourable impression on this proud beautiful girl.

When Hilda had given the necessary orders she took her garden-hat and went out ; she remembered that she had not seen Ernest since breakfast, and had been too much occupied the last few days to notice him much—now she went to seek him.

She did not find him in the garden, or the orchard, where she had expected to see him stretched under a tree devouring a book ; for Ernest was a book-worm, reading every thing that came in his way, *except* books for children, or young people, for such he entertained supreme aversion. Not finding him, Hilda passed out

of the shadow of the trees proceeding to mount the open hill-side. It was still, sultry noon ; the sun blazed down upon the short turf, making the few sheep seek the shelter of any bush, or tall tuft of heather ; the seed pods of the gorse exploded now and then with a sharp report, that was the only sound to be heard in the deep hush. Hilda had come out cold, shivered by sudden pain, but she soon felt the sun's fierce rays unendurable in that exposed spot.

A little to the left there was a glen—a mere crack in the hill-side— tufted by bushes and small trees, down which a stream fell—only a silver thread, now, making a gentle tinkling, but, after rain, a very headlong little torrent, wearing its channel deeper and deeper. Hilda sought this welcome shelter ; stepping from stone to stone, she walked in the course of the water, mounting to a spot that Ernest called her bower.

There she found her boy ; he was lying with his face buried in moss, his thin brown hands clasped behind his head ; close beside him, their stems in a little pool, some fading flowers were arranged. Hilda thought he was asleep, till she saw a thrill pass through his slight frame ; she sat down, spoke to him, turned up his face, and drew his head upon her lap.

His face was flushed and angry-looking, he pushed her cool hands off his brow impatiently, and sat up.

“ Those flowers ?” Hilda asked, half-imagining the cause of his disturbance, “ were you too late to give them to Anna, the other morning ?”

“ No.”

“ How was it then ?”

“ That woman threw them out again.”

"Who?—not Anna!"

"No, indeed, not Anna."

"Who?"

"The carriage was going very fast—I daresay on purpose—and, in my hurry, I threw the flowers into that Amelia's lap, instead of into Anna's, and she caught them up and threw them out."

"That was unkind."

"Anna stretched out eagerly, and I ran as fast as I could, but I couldn't catch them. It was abominable of that Amelia. I hate her!"

"Why didn't you tell this to me before?"

"You didn't care to know—you didn't ask—I knew you had things to trouble you. I wish Anna were not a Meynard, then I'd hate the whole set of them!"

"Hush! Anna will know you didn't forget her."

"There is some consolation in that," Ernest admitted.

Hilda had not much trouble in winning him to a gentler mood, and then she led him to remember how *hate* must be a thing unknown beneath the breastplate of a soldier of *the army*.

It was delicious up there, greenly cool and dim. Hilda made a good listener, and Ernest, having her there all to himself, found many treasures to show her—many strange, fair fancies that had come to him in that place to tell her of.

When, at last, his sister didn't seem to be quite listening, Ernest grew silent, content to watch her as she sat leaning against a bit of mossy rock; the light, straggling in through ash and birch boughs, flecking her hair; her hands folded over his own, and her eyes looking afar

off, as if they saw things more strangely beautiful than the glimpses of distant hill and of low-lying water and wood, glimmering in the heat, discernible through the near boughs. Ernest resolved to paint a picture of her sitting so, some day, when he could do it well enough.

Hilda could not stay half so long as he would have liked, but he followed her down when she went away.

Mr. Stanton had seemed ill the day before, and any extreme of heat or cold affected him severely—so Hilda was vexed to meet him at the hall-door, just about to go out with Mr. Larne. Anxious to dissuade her father from his scheme of driving round the neighbourhood in this mid-day heat, Hilda did not notice Mr. Larne's admiring glances, or remembered her disordered hair—she certainly did look very charming in her pretty hat.

She gained her point—the drive was postponed till the cool of the evening; but, then that almost necessitated Mr. Larne's being invited to stay and dine and sleep at the parsonage, which he readily agreed to do.

“Your son, I presume?” Mr. Larne said, noticing Ernest for the first time, and stretching out a hand to him condescendingly.

“My son—my only son,” Mr. Stanton repeated, looking down somewhat sadly at the boy, who reluctantly responded to Mr. Larne's greeting. Then he took his guest with him into his library—perhaps the latter would rather have lounged in the drawing-room—but, turning over books and reviews, and discussing authors, compilers, and annotators, the time passed swiftly. The elder man discovered that his visitor's acquirements were more than respectable, his abilities decidedly above the average. On

the other hand, Mr. Larne, impressed by the profundity of Mr. Stanton's learning, and somewhat startled at the heterodox originality of his thoughts and opinions on some subjects, was awed into a quiet and earnest manner. A young man appears to advantage in the presence of a gifted elder whom he treats with deserved respect; yet it is too common now-a-days to see middle-aged men spoken to with flippant contempt, and stupidly ridiculed, by those who—their inferiors in every way—pride themselves on belonging to the "new school," on having "done with all that."

Mr. Stanton and Mr. Larne were on more cordial terms than Hilda expected when they joined her at the dinner-table. She had taken the trouble to make a dinner-toilet, partly out of compliment to her father's guest, partly out of opposition to an inward inclination to be careless about dress now.

Her father, grown wonderfully observant of late, rewarded her with a gratified, encouraging look. Mr. Larne, just the kind of man to admire beauty most when its trappings were costly and fashionable, was "immensely" taken with Miss Stanton.

As they drank coffee in the drawing-room, before starting on their drive, Mr. Larne turned over some of the music heaped up by the piano.

"It is tantalizing, Miss Stanton, only to see this music," he said. "You must, I am sure, be an accomplished musician, judging, as is only fair, by the *matériel* here—Beethoven, Bach, Handel, Hadyn, Mendlessohn, Mozart, not to mention Spohr, Bellini, Rossini, and many lesser stars of the divine constellation."

“As it happens, you must not judge of my daughter’s skill by the nature of her collection. Most of those volumes were left her, as a legacy, by a valued friend of mine, who was himself an exquisite musician.”

Mr. Larne then noticed the “H. H. M.” stamped on the covers of some of the volumes, and felt as if he had again touched on a dangerous topic. He had been unsuccessful in his attempts to draw Hilda into conversation; several times her father had thus interposed, answering for her; he would have doubted if her mind were as well endowed as her person, had it not been for the eminently intellectual shape of her head (phrenology was fashionable), and for occasional bright kindlings of interest and intelligence, when Mr. Stanton turned to her for the ratification of what he said.

Mr. Larne found his thoughts very busy with Miss Stanton, during his long ride with her father.

“Now we can have a happy evening!” Ernest exclaimed, when he saw his father drive off with the stranger.

Hilda had thrown herself on the sofa, wearily, looking languid and dispirited. Ernest noticed it.

“How your face has changed, Hilda, that moment since they went,” he said.

“I am rather tired, of hearing Mr. Larne talk, perhaps; what shall we do this evening? Do you want to go on the water?”

“I wish lakes would be on the tops of hills.”

“Why?”

“I should like them better; sometimes now when I’m on the water, under the shadows of the Black Hill, I

know exactly how Christian felt, when he got into the wrong road, and stood still under the overhanging cliffs."

"That's a strange fancy; Christian was afraid, because he was conscious of guilt."

"And you remember, one night I went out without leave, and it darkened fast, and the shadows grew ink-black, and the ~~wind~~ rose stormily, and I didn't expect to get home."

"I remember we were all frightened for you."

"I am afraid when I am not conscious of guilt, too," Ernest said, and he cast an eerie glance round; but the late afternoon sun was pouring in, and there were no dark corners—no mysterious shadows now.

"Sometimes," he went on, "it's only the darkness itself that's terrible — sometimes things I see in the darkness; sometimes, in broad daylight, stupid things make me afraid. There was a book papa gave me with pictures, one of the plates in it was of a whirlpool, black and boiling, and a ship coming on to be sucked into it—that was horrible to me—I could see it without opening the book. Sometimes I remember it now—there's the water curling and whirling, the ship coming on for ever! —Hilda," he went on, after a pause, calmly and positively, "one night I saw my mother, sitting at the foot of my bed, looking at me so lovingly—It wasn't a dream!—it was a light night and I sat up in bed—I was just going to speak, when she—it—changed into something frightful. I took up my pillow and threw, and then buried my face."

"You never saw your mother, dear, how could you know her?"

“It was my mother.”

“Look how low the sun is getting, Ernest!” Hilda exclaimed; “we shall not get on the moor before it sets, unless you make haste. Get your cap, and I’ll be ready immediately.”

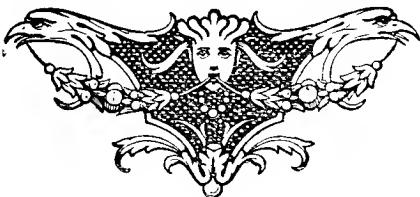
They both climbed the steep way slowly and wearily, but, once on the moor, the wind, rushing straight from over the unseen, but not very distant sea, brought them freshness and strength.

When Hilda went into Ernest’s room late that night, her eyes were met by two shining, starry, very wide-open ones.

“Not asleep yet, naughty boy?” she said.

He answered, throwing his arms round her—

“No! Hilda;—I’ve had a great many things—*real* things—to think of; but I am sleepy now.”





CHAPTER VI.

MR. MEYNARD, while breakfasting with his family a few mornings after Mr. Larne's visit to Wynndale, received a letter the contents of which much disturbed him. His mother's sharp eyes noted this, in answer to their enquiry the letter was thrown across the table to her with a muttered malediction upon its writer.

Mrs. Meynard read it through without any sign of discomposure, as she refolded it she said—

“Really, Hendon, I don't see anything here that need irritate you; Mr. Larne expresses himself very properly about his sense of obligation to you. As to the other matter, I must say I am rather surprised he should be so struck with Miss Stanton, but it is very prudent of him to try and gain information that may be useful before he commits himself. You see he thinks, very naturally, that your connection ended long ago. As things are it would be very undesirable for him to entangle himself with her, as you will let him know. He alludes to his

cousin's precarious state—if that cousin die, he will come into a very handsome property indeed, and may do much better."

Mr. Meynard was walking up and down the room fiercely, and did not heed half his mother's speech. Amelia took up the letter when Mrs. Meynard laid it down.

"Evidently," she commented as she read, "your immaculate goddess is somewhat of a coquette after all—no gentleman would write in this strain of a girl from whom he had received *no encouragement*."

"Do you wish to madden me?" Mr. Meynard asked, snatching the letter from her hand.

"Certainly not: I only speak what I think—Miss Stanton's very contented, composed manner the last time we saw her, made mamma and me say that probably she was tired of you and had other expectations—and really—"

"Be silent," Mr. Meynard thundered—Amelia cowered somewhat before the fire in his eyes and contented herself with shrugging her shoulders and smiling compassionately as she left the room—A few moments after Mrs. Meynard was called away.

Anna had been silent; she looked pale, languid and spiritless; but when they were alone, she went to her brother, put her hand through his arm and said—

"May I read the letter? Why do they dare hint such things about Hilda?" It was given her sullenly—her cheek flushed as she read, then she looked up at him with flashing eyes and asked.

"You don't insult Hilda by thinking—"

"I don't know what I think," her brother interrupted passionately—"but I know I can't go on so, suspense will kill me, it shall end—I will go to Wynndale immediately."

"But Hendon you were to wait till you could show her that time wouldn't change you—this will seem weakness—unworthy jealousy."

"I can't help what it may seem—soon they will leave Wynndale and I may lose all trace of them."

"It would be easy to find them if you *willed* it, and would help to prove you determined and steadfast."

"You need say no more, Anna, I shall go."

"Where have you so heroically resolved to go?" Mrs. Meynard, who had re-entered quietly, asked.

"To Wynndale," her son answered with a dogged air—expecting to encounter vigorous opposition. He was mistaken, Mrs. Meynard smiled and said—

"Well! I almost expected this! You will appear infinitely ridiculous to the Stantons—but that is your affair. You must not go to-morrow however for you are engaged to dine at the Sinclair's—Mr. Sinclair is a man who may be very useful to you, and he is easily offended."

Anna glanced at her brother—Mrs. Meynard remembered that the dressmaker was waiting for Anna up stairs, and sent her away. Then she went on,

"Let me see! To-morrow, Thursday, the Sinclairs, on Friday you must escort your sisters—my health won't stand those out-of-door entertainments. Mrs. Lenard promised to chaperone them, if you accompanied them, but she won't have them entirely left upon her hands."

“It is no use,”—Hendon interrupted—“I must start on Friday—my sisters must stay at home if they can’t go without me.”

“They shall on no account do that—this will be an introduction for them into a most desirable set.”

“Then let Mrs. Sinclair take them; she’s good tempered enough!”

“She is not invited; and, besides, though the gentlemen of that family are well enough, *she* is a vulgar woman, with whom I should not choose my daughters to appear. If you cannot put off this ridiculous expedition one day to oblige us, I shall go myself—though I know the exposure will be sure to bring on an attack.”

“Spare me! I will stay over Friday—then nothing shall prevent my starting.”

Mrs. Meynard, afraid of rousing the latent obstinacy of a weak nature, said no more then; though she hoped to be able to find cause after cause for delaying this visit till the Stantons should have left Wynndale.

After his expression of determination, Mr. Meynard went away. His first occupation was to write a note, the receipt of which caused Mr. Larne a good deal of annoyance; but, as it came from one who was his “patron,” and, evidently, very much in love—and, too, as it gave him information about Miss Stanton’s want of fortune, and her father’s “conscientious” dissent from orthodoxy which quite nipped in the bud his own passion for that lady—he forgot to resent the want of courtesy in the manner of the curt note he received, and penned a few apologetic and conciliatory lines in reply.

Mrs. Meynard, left alone, sat down to her work-table.

She plied her needle diligently, her brow knit in perplexed thought : she cast no longing looks out and up at the sky as poor Anna did, sitting in her room above idle and unhappy—old country recollections stirred by the light summer wind, that waved the muslin curtains, and brought her in the odour of flowers with which Hendon had filled her balcony.

The day was hot, and the breeze that came in over the glaring pavements blew anything but coolness ; but Mrs. Meynard's movements were not a whit less energetic than usual. After a while, she put down her work with a resolved look : she had made up her mind that it would be a piece of skilful diplomacy to write frankly to Mr. Stanton in a manner throwing herself upon his mercy.

So she began in a very conciliatory tone ; then told him how Mr. Larne's inopportune letter had annoyed her son, who had before appeared to be in capital health and spirits, and caused him to form an absurd scheme of immediately rushing back to Wynndale, to lay himself at his fair one's feet, and entreat her to take him again into her favour.

“I dare say,” Mrs. Meynard wrote, “that Hendon will urge you to consent to some conditional engagement, imposing on him a term of probation, during which he is to prove his constancy—very pretty in a novel ! —but you, my dear sir, know how such affairs end in real life. Your daughter would be harassed by suspense—would have an idea that it was her duty to conquer any inclination to form a more suitable attachment—would grow prematurely old and worn. A romantic girl will always prefer being a ‘martyr to an unfortunate attach-

ment' to breaking with a 'first love,' and quietly marrying some fit and respectable person, and becoming a healthy matron and mother.

"I need hardly remind you that the instability we have lamented in Hendon's character precludes the probability of his remaining 'constant'; yet I have no doubt that at Wynndale he will play the despairing lover in a moving manner. If you choose, you will find it easy to prevent a meeting between the young people, and to take the matter entirely into your own hands—so, I fancy, spare your daughter pain, and your friend's son from making a lamentable display of infirmity of purpose. But I feel I may safely let the affair rest with you—leave all to your discretion.

"We shall leave town, for the sea-side, shortly. Anna is not yet acclimatized, and seems to need more bracing air.

"I have written to you very freely, and remain,

"Very truly yours,

"C. L. MEYNARD."





CHAPTER VII.

HINGS did not go on smoothly in Mr. Stanton's study, one hot morning. Mr. Stanton was disturbed, and not so patient as usual, and Ernest was flushed and nervous.

At last the boy was dismissed, and the father fell into deep thought. It was a long and irregular post to Wynn-dale, and Mrs. Meynard's letter had only arrived that morning ; as yet, Hilda knew nothing about it.

Mr. Stanton felt, that some things Mrs. Meynard said, were undeniably true. Should he forewarn and fore-arm Hilda ? he wondered—bid her be ice-mailed against her lover's supplications ? He fancied and feared that he could read in her patient face that the sacrifice she was making was almost more than she could bear. He believed, that, if young Meynard should come and succeed in making her feel that she did him a real injury in giving him up altogether, just now ; her resolution would falter, if not wholly give way.

He resolved to tell Hilda, that Hendon might come to

Wynndale within the few next days, so guard her from extreme surprise, and—for the rest—“God keep and guide her,” he said.

Seeking her in vain for this purpose, he learnt on enquiry, that she had been fetched into the village by a child whose mother was in some trouble. He returned to his study, and occupied himself in turning out the contents of his writing-table drawers—the thought of near removal was very painfully present to him. He came upon sundry forgotten manuscripts—not of sermons—but fragments of essays, reviews, and poems, and became engrossed in looking them over.

When summoned to join his son and daughter at the dinner-table, his mind was occupied with one subject—interest in which had rekindled after lying dormant for years—he returned to his study immediately after the meal, without having spoken to Hilda. In the evening he went into the village, at Hilda’s request, to the house she had visited in the morning, taking Ernest with him, and not having fulfilled his intention.

Left alone, Hilda tried to settle to some occupation ; but she was both weary and restless, and thoughts of things past and future crowded upon her, not following each other in calm procession, but thronging, whirling, jostling, making sad bewilderment.

The sun set as she sat by the window—the freshened air, that felt night’s approach, came into the room laden with rich garden fragrance, and tempted her out. There everything was lovely, infinitely peaceful, and she longed to enter into that peace ; but that garden was no place of peace for her, its every nook had some tale of bitter-sweet

old times to tell ; her's was a weak, doubting mood that night, such as sometimes comes over the strongest natured.

Pausing in a dim corner, she read over her lover's last letter ; it was full of fervent life and passion, painted, too, what his life *might* be with her—what, he thought, it *must* be without her. Warm colour flushed Hilda's face, passionate tears dimmed her eyes as she read. Then she questioned—had she not been rash, and selfish, and proud—thought too much of her own dignity and peace ? If, indeed, she had power to shape a man's life to noble end, must she not try and use it, though her own happiness might be wrecked in an impotent endeavour ?

As she bewildered herself with thinking, the sheltered garden seemed to grow stifling, and she took her way up the orchard and the steep behind it.

When she had almost reached the ridge of the moor, the wind suddenly rushed upon her ; it blew her hair across her eyes, and ruffled her light dress, as she stood leaning against the solitary fir tree of the hill side ; but its cool freshness was very welcome. That storm-smitten fir was a friend of hers ; many a soft summer eve she had listened to its mystic voice—many a wild autumn day had hearkened to its roaring, till her cheek had paled with a strange awe, and her lips curved to a still smile that filled her eyes with tears.

She was high enough up to see over the orchard down to the road, the lake, the village ; her listless gazing changed suddenly to an eager looking forward.

Then she sank down at the old tree's foot, leaning her head back against its rough trunk. How well she knew who it was she had seen arrive ! How hard she tried

to think ! What could have happened ? How should she speak, how act ? All was a whirl of unreasoning emotion.

She believed herself safe there—closed her eyes in sick suspense, and tried to summon up needed strength and courage. All at once she knew he was near. She had heard no footsteps on the short turf ; but, springing up, found him standing close before her. “ After all,”—she thought, and this calmed her—“ his visit may not concern me ; I dare say he is angry still that I did not answer his letter.”

The pale hand she offered him was steady, and her face, Mr. Meynard thought, proud and determined.

“ It is very cold and windy here,” he said ; “ but, of course, you can judge, if you are prudent in staying out so late.”

“ I was just going in,” Hilda answered, with a slight shiver.

His greeting silenced any expression of surprise, and its tone at once angered and moved her.

“ I am sorry papa is out,” she added.

“ I met him.”

“ Have you left London long ?” she felt it needful to say something.

“ I came here as quickly as possible.” He picked up a shawl she had dropped ; was about to throw it over her —then stopped, gave it into her hand, and said—“ Excuse me ! I had forgotten,” in a sullen, dejected way.

Hilda did not speak ; they went down the slope together ; as Mr. Meynard held the orchard-gate open for her she glanced at his face ; it looked painfully worn and haggard.

“How is Anna?” she asked, finding questioning safer than silence.

“Well, I believe they are very gay—I am the only one who suffers, and, I suppose, the only one for whom Miss Stanton can spare no sympathy.” There was a childish petulance in his manner which Hilda despised; but he went on in a more manly tone:—

“I see I might have spared myself this pain. You are still satisfied that it is your *duty* to give me up—to leave me—at the most critical period of my life, to meet all temptations deprived of the one thing that would have given me power to resist them; you still——”

“Hendon!” Hilda exclaimed, in a tone that made him pause and look in her face: her eyes were full of tears; hope rose wildly in his heart; he seized her hand:—

“Hilda! Hilda! what does that tone mean? You pity me!—you repent!—you will sacrifice your noble pride for me—overlook——”

“Hush! you are talking wildly! sacrifice my pride!” she repeated, slowly.

“Yes! Hilda, your pride—you were proud, cold, cruel! You do not know what I have suffered—then that letter—to be subject to things of that kind!”

“What letter?—what do you mean?”

“I have it here—read it.”

Hilda paused to do so; indignant blood flushed her face, but it had paled to cold contempt, when she returned the letter, saying—

“*You* care for this? show me this letter; do you dare think——”

Mr. Meynard felt he had made a mistake, he broke in passionately—

“It was not this—not only this—but the uncertainty will kill me—as long as you are distant, not holding yourself mine—how can I have any rest? It is bitter mockery to expect me to work, to do anything, with this pain always at my heart—this dread to torture and madden me!”

“Do *I* suffer nothing, do you think?”

“You do not love as I do.”

“I do not think I do!”

“You say that calmly! to my face! Hilda, do you mean——”

“Not what you think I do.”

“Then you love me—you yield—you will be the angel—the good angel of my future life?”

“No! Hendon, I do not yield, I promise nothing—I must see what my duty is, and do it.”

“Duty! always duty: you can torture ingeniously.”

“Pray be patient and just.”

“It is only you that will ever make me that, or anything good,” he said, stooping to kiss her hand tenderly. “Ho! Hilda! I am sadly, seriously in earnest, when I say that my only pure, true life, is with you.”

“But, Hendon, you must live out your life for yourself; no man is worthy of a good woman’s love, whose life is not in itself true and noble, away from her as with her!”

“Patience! dear Hilda, only let me hope! if I may shroud your love in my heart, it shall leaven all my nature.

One day you will surely have to render account for me as for your second self."

"No one can truly say that to another—you must stand or fall for yourself—be but true to your better self——"

"You are my better self, Hilda!"

"Nay!" Hilda said, shaking her head mournfully.

"After seeing me, talking to me, looking at me kindly, Hilda, you will not be cruel? You will promise——?"

"Nothing to-night. Does Mrs. Meynard know where you are?"

"I am my own master," he answered, haughtily. "Let us talk of pleasant things."

"We must talk no more—you must go now, please."

"You are soon tired of me."

"It is very late."

"If I go, I shall walk the moor to-night—I shall not sleep—but, remember, I *will* hope, if you disappoint me, I shall grow reckless of life, of everything."

"Go, now," Hilda urged.

Mr. Stanton's voice was heard—Hilda went into the house, and Mr. Meynard up the hill.

Hilda had just seated herself in the dusky drawing-room, when Ernest and Mr. Stanton entered. Ernest was soon sent to bed, and then Mr. Stanton sat down by his daughter, drew her head on to his shoulder.

"Well, child?" he said.

"Do you know, papa——"

"What brought poor Hendon to Wynndale?—Yes!"

"What must I do? how ill he looks!"

"You must decide."

"I am afraid, afraid of myself—I do not seem to know, to feel certain of anything—I am afraid I shall do wrong."

"My dear love, I cannot help you."

"Indeed, you can. What *ought* I to do?"

"It is a sad business. We were to lame, we elders, when we permitted an engagement between two such children."

"The past is irrevocable."

"Surely!—so there's no philosophy in bewailing it. Do you still love this young man, Hilda?"

"I do," she answered, quietly.

"Not pity, but love him, remember. There is some truth in what he pleads, he staid to talk to me, about the cruelty of breaking off the engagement just now, when he most needs every good influence. But, child, I must consider you, my daughter."

"No, papa, only consider what is right. I feel—and I do not think it is a mere fancy—that either way I shall suffer."

"Child?"

"It seems to me that my position with Hendon is false—he gives himself up to me. But I want to think of something better than happiness—of doing right."

"I fancy, Hilda, you do *not* love him."

But Hilda needed only to think of her desolate feeling of that very evening before he came, to answer very confidently that she did.

"If I could only feel sure of his trustworthiness, of his constancy!—but—" and Mr. Stanton sighed.

"Do you think, papa, if I persist in my determination to regard myself free, that will influence his future un-

favourably? Will he be a better man for having my promise to marry him in two years, if he still wishes it?"

"Possibly!"

"Then, another thing puzzles me—Can it be right to come between a mother and son, causing discord?"

"Mrs. Meynard, it seems to me, is only half a mother; she regards the worldly interests of her children—schemes and plots unweariedly for those—but cares for nothing higher and holier."

"Poor woman! I have watched her, papa, I know she is not happy. If she had let me love her—but that is past—if I consent to do as Hendon wishes, she will dislike me more than ever."

"Should you feel glad to have your chains clamped round you again, Hilda?" Mr. Stanton asked after a thoughtful pause.

"Chains! papa, those days since Hendon left, I have felt most as if weighed upon by chains."

"But you were getting used to it?"

"After a sad fashion. Papa, you do not think I am deceiving myself—arrogating a power I don't possess? I mean in thinking myself of so much importance to Hendon. May not some other woman be able to do for him more, and better than I can?"

"No, child, he gave you his first love—he won't love again as he loves you—no other woman will have so much influence for good with him."

"Then something, at last, seems clear and certain; that I belong to him while he continues to love me."

Hilda seemed to *rest* on that conclusion, and her father did not gainsay it. After a while he said—

“I see, Hilda, how your heart decides. God bless you ! but I shall watch him and try him, before I give him my treasure ; so we live and struggle on together many a day yet. No more of this to-night—I will speak to Hendon in the morning. By-the-bye, to-morrow you must go with me to look at a little house near a place called Seadonfell.”

“A pretty name ! will it suit us ?” Hilda asked, dreamily.

“Arle thinks it may—he has settled in that neighbourhood, after his long wanderings—he says the air is very pure and bracing—that he shall make a man of Ernest in no time ; he fancies we spoil the boy, Hilda.”

“Indeed,” Hilda answered, looking displeased.

“It would be no use, I am sure, for me to enter into any discussion of ways and means with you, now, child ; we must be early to-morrow, so go to bed.”

Hilda, confessing that she was tired, obeyed ; but she did not soon go to sleep ; her brain seemed confused, and she wanted to set it straight ; so she went on pondering and wondering, till heart and head were alike weary.

Pausing, at last, to fold her arms meekly and lift her eyes up in endeavour to pierce through the darkness, she fell asleep.

Sometimes, when faithful peace, then quiet sleep, fall upon us, does it not seem a pity that the sleep should be less lasting than that of Death ? in such mood would we wish to close our eyes—bidding not one day, but one world, farewell.



CHAPTER VIII.

MR. MEYNARD had already been long at the parsonage when Hilda came down next morning; yet she had to wait some time before he and her father came into the breakfast-room.

When they did come, Hendon went up to her and passionately grasped the hand she offered him; she tried to meet his eager eyes with a bright, trustful look; but he was not satisfied, turned from her, and stood by the window in moody thought. After speaking to her father, Hilda followed him, picked a rose growing within reach, and gave it him with a smile he could not misinterpret.

But more than a slight cloud settled down on the young man's face when, during breakfast, Mr. Stanton told him of the visit they proposed making to Seadonfell and its object, asking if he would accompany them; so many unpleasant thoughts were connected with the idea of their leaving Wynndale, and this visit might have been postponed, he thought.

Hilda watched him as he remained silent, and, leaf by leaf, plucked to pieces the rose she had given him; a draught through the room, as a servant entered with the letters, blew the crimson petals into her lap, and she quietly collected them. Suddenly Mr. Meynard seemed to remember that this flower had been given him in token of renewed amity: he took the leaves from Hilda's hands, asking pardon for his thoughtlessness and petulance as he laid them away in his card-case.

"A letter for you, Meynard—brought over from the hall," Mr. Stanton said.

The letter was looked at with dislike and opened reluctantly: it was from Mrs. Meynard—its every line grated harshly against some sensitive nerve. The lady chose to take for granted that her son's had been a bootless errand, and urged his wasting no time in playing the disconsolate lover, but returning to town immediately; she also expressed her conviction that a young person of Miss Stanton's character would feel it absurd and wrong to re-accept a lover with whom she had broken her engagement so short a time before! There was much more to this effect, yet when Mr. Meynard had read the letter he passed it to Hilda, saying low, as excuse—

"See, what you might save us both if you would but marry me at once!"

But Hilda would not read the letter; she knew how Mrs. Meynard's words could sting, and did not see the need of giving them opportunity of doing so.

"You have not told papa if you will go with us to-day?" Hilda reminded her irritated lover.

"Of course, I shall go with you! Where is it you are going?"

"To Seadonfell!" Mr. Stanton said.

"Seadonfell!"—Mr. Meynard echoed—"what a wild, out-of-the-way place!—what makes you think of going there?"

"Arle wrote to me about an empty house near there!"

"Is Arle in England? I didn't know it. Well!" he added, turning to Hilda, "I shall certainly have no rivals at Seadonfell—you will have absolutely no society there."

"I do not much care," Hilda answered.

"You regard yourself as 'a maiden vowed and dedicate,' I suppose," Mr. Stanton said, smiling. "But now, no more dawdling—the boat has been waiting this half-hour, I expect: be quick in getting ready, Hilda."

"It is a glorious day for the lake, with this light breeze ruffling the water; but I suppose we don't do much more than cross it," Mr. Meynard said.

"We go some little distance down."

As they went through the garden, Mr. Meynard noticed that no one had provided extra wrappings, and Hilda might find it cold coming home; so he ran back to hunt up shawls and cloaks, and returned laden. A happy warmth came into Hilda's heart as he drew her hand through his disengaged arm—it was so pleasant to be cared for. From her father she did not receive these small attentions; though he would have been willing to wrap his own coat round her, had it proved cold.

The frequency of such excursions did not prevent Ernest from enjoying this day intensely; he had the poet's and the child's ever-new joy in familiar things.

Hilda and Mr. Meynard had much quiet talk as they went slowly down the blue lake—sitting together in the end of the boat. It happened—as of old—that she brought his mood into harmony with hers ; and then, his better nature only awake, he poured out its best things before her, and was, for the time, the Hendon Meynard who had won her girlish devotion.

His choice in life was not yet made ; he was neither a child of this world, wise in his generation—nor a child of God, wise in innocence, in the calm of Faith : he was rather a child of light, groping in alien darkness, conscious of capacity for other and better things, yet weak of will ; a feeble reed blown upon by all winds, now bowed down in worship of earth and earthliness—now raised erect, aspiring heavenward.

What but fair and holy thoughts *could* come to him now—such a sky over-head, so mirrored beneath, the grand hills ringing him round—a true soul looking from Hilda's eyes into his, her hand lying in his own ?

Bit by bit he let fall his mother's letter into the water—felt as if he cast all worldliness away, as he dreamily watched the fragments, left further and further behind.

When they reached their point on the opposite side of the lake, Mr. Meynard and Hilda were left under some trees that drooped their branches into the water, while Mr. Stanton and Ernest went to see what vehicle could be obtained to take them to Seadonfell.

“I think I will play truant—never be heard of in London more !” Mr. Meynard said, as he stretched himself on the turf. “Will you, Hilda, please write to mamma ? ‘Regret to communicate the distressing in-

telligence' that her son—driven to despair, it is supposed, by your inflexible resolution has thrown himself into the lake—that his remains were washed on shore and identified the morning you write. Indeed," he went on, changing a playful tone to one of passionate earnestness, "this might have been a true story! I felt very desperate, very reckless! Well, how much would they—would you, dearest, have cared?"

Hilda's face was very pale; she said—

"Do not talk so, Hendon. Suicide is so terrible, so wicked, I cannot hear it talked of in a jesting tone."

"I am serious enough now, Hilda, when I ask why will you drive me back to a life of trial and temptation? You do not care for riches—we could live quietly, and be happy."

"Would you like to live *here* so?" Hilda asked.

"Well, perhaps, not here, where people know me—but those two years! Why shouldn't we be happy now?"

"You would not be happy—you are not fitted for living in the 'come live with me and be my love' style."

"You are mocking me! Has not your father lived at Wynndale for many years."

"That is quite different! Papa has so many interests and occupations!"

"You would be all things to me!"

Hilda shook her head, "No, Hendon, you would soon repent any such choice of life—so should I—there is work enough, of one kind or another, to be done in the world—no one pair of hands has a right to be idle."

“ Horrors ! Hilda do not talk in that style—it is a woman’s ‘mission’ to look beautiful, to be admired, not to work in any way.”

Smiling somewhat sadly, somewhat contemptuously, Hilda answered.

“ Supposing the admirer does not come, must the poor idol remain on her pedestal, petrifying in a graceful attitude ? must—”

But the arrival of Mr. Stanton and Ernest with a carriage, stopped the conversation.

“ What an extremely elegant conveyance ! ” Mr. Meynard said, with a secret satisfaction, that on the rough road to Seadonfell they should be safe from meeting any members of the “ families ” of the neighbourhood.

“ If we should meet anyone, who *is* any one, Meynard—we will hide you under the cloaks and shawls—Hilda and I have no reputation for the completeness of our turn-out to keep up. I shall be well content,” Mr. Stanton added, “ if these sorry steeds perform the journey creditably.”

“ Do you know the road well ? ”

“ I can’t say that I do, and I have received so many directions and cautions that it will be a wonder if we don’t meet with some adventure—Come, Hilda, you and Hendon get in, Ernest will mount beside me.”

A last warning from the man who had held the horses, to mind about the awsome bad bit of road, and a recommendation that they should get out, and the beasts be led down, made Hilda uneasy, afraid that the fatigues of the expedition would be too much for her father ; but off

they started, keeping along the water awhile, then winding up and round hills, and traversing a wide track of moor lying behind them.

Hilda did not try to talk as they jolted over the rude road ; she was better pleased to lean back and note all the varying beauty of earth, sky and water. It was very lovely, yet—always that yet—she had been happier : she could not give herself up to enjoyment of the present ; and there was something in the aspect of her dimly-discerned future that troubled her.

Mr. Meynard sinking back, after carrying on a difficult conversation with Mr. Stanton, glanced anxiously at her grave face, then she smiled, and they both lapsed into dreamy silence.

The sudden stopping of the carriage roused them. They were come to the bit of road, bad—*par excellence*—it was a fearful hill, the way down little more than a sheep-track.

They thought how they should ascend it, returning at night—but Ernest, the calendar, re-assured them by promise of a full moon and a clear sky.

They all got out, and, by dint of caution, the carriage and horses reached the foot of the hill unscathed. There was a bridge there, over a sparkling brown stream, shaded by some trees, and they stopped to rest in the welcome coolness.

Then they pursued their journey merrily awhile driving over a turf level. More hills were mounted, another moor gained, across which the wind blew very fresh, and, presently, Ernest startled Hilda by exclaiming, in a shrill voice—

“The sea ! Hilda.—Papa, the sea !”

“Are you surprised, too, Hilda ?” Mr. Stanton asked. “I wonder the name—Seadonfell—didn’t reveal the delightful fact. It’s being so near the sea is one great recommendation to this house we’ve to look at.”

Ernest was silent after his first exclamation, watching the line of flashing light change into a broad, blue, heaving expanse, as they proceeded.

Hilda stood up, put her arm round him, and looked out over his shoulder. “Well, Ernest ?”

“Isn’t it delightful ?” he said, turning a beaming face towards her ; “I loved the lake, but the sea !”

“Moderate your rapture, children !” Mr. Stanton interposed ; “the house may not suit us, you know.”

“The house !” Ernest exclaimed.

“You would like to live in a cave, wouldn’t you, Ernest ?” Mr. Meynard asked.

“The boy’s cheek reddened at the tone of the question ; but he forgot that, and said, musingly—

“Like Miranda ! but I do not think I should be able to sleep on stormy nights. Hilda,” he added, speaking low, “I had a dream one night about a sea. I was standing alone on a shore covered with snow ; I felt such a tiny dark speck, and I was afraid. Snow was falling, and, at first, I couldn’t see far before me, or round me ; dark-coloured clouds hung down from the sky to the earth ; but a cold wind came and stirred the clouds, and they rolled away, and the snow left off falling, and I could see a long way. Before me there was a sea of snow ! it moved, piled itself up in great waves, and came rolling

on and on : I could not stir ; they came tumbling on and on, and I knew they would soon smother me."

"Then you woke up, I suppose, and the sun was shining hot and bright," Hilda said.

"Yes, but I wished the dream had finished—I don't like remembering how the wave was *just going* to smother me."

"What is the boy talking about ?" Mr. Meynard said, impatiently, drawing Hilda down beside him again.

"About a dream."

"Children should not be allowed to talk about dreams—they exercise their imagination more than their memory."

"Ernest isn't quite a child, or like other children."

"He never will be like other people, I am afraid."

"Is that needful ?" Hilda asked smiling.

"I don't know—it is generally considered so, isn't it ?"

"Papa's theory is that people should be more tolerant of diversity : that there would be more happy people if each followed the bent of peculiar taste unmolested."

"Quoting me, Hilda ?" Mr. Stanton asked.

"Am I quoting right ?"

"I certainly see no reason why we shouldn't allow of at least as many varieties of the human species, as of the vegetable kingdom ; yet we give prizes for a specimen of something new in the latter and try with might and main to put down anything not according to rule in the former. I do not see why, training and shaping our children after one conventional model, we should yet rejoice in the infinite diversity of Nature's manifestations of grace and beauty in our fields and gardens."

"I do confess that the sameness pervading human nature is oftentimes wearisome," Hendon said.

"Not human nature, so much as human manners. For with all our endeavour, we do not educe any real unity, even harmony, rather we aggravate discord—fill some with a miserable sense of the enormity of singularity they cannot generalize, others with a proud conviction of their superiority to 'common people,' as they call those whom they imagine they perfectly understand. It is a noticeable fact that you don't find the greatest happiness, or virtue, where people live in masses, grinding one from another all outward distinctive marks, yet—thank God—this cruel process can affect little but externals—the core of each heart retains its individuality.—But I must leave off discoursing to drive carefully down this hill, our last, I think."

They came down close upon a bit of wild, rock-strewn beach, shut in on each side by bold rocky points; there was a group of cottages in a small hollow in the hill-side.

"Arle was to meet us here, I fancy—but I see no one—'" Mr. Stanton said, "Hilda, speak to that tiny specimen of humanity—ask if a gentleman has been here this morning."

"He's yon," was the answer received from a sturdy, yellow-haired child who took her fingers from her mouth to point seaward: that information given she retreated into the cottage to emerge therefrom with others of her kind, who stood gazing at the strange folk and the grand carriage with blue eyes opened to their widest.

Looking in the direction the chubby finger had indicated, they saw a dark figure standing upon a fragment of rock, from which the tide had just receded.

At Mr. Stanton's shout, the figure moved and came towards them with great strides.

"I began to think you had decoyed us into your wilderness, to leave us to our fate, Arle," Mr. Stanton said.

"I've been waiting an hour or two—have inspected the interior of all those cottages—then went on to the beach: the noise of the water and the sea-birds prevented my hearing your wheels, I suppose."

"A fit native! What an uncouth-looking fellow he has grown!" Mr. Meynard remarked, when he had returned Mr. Arle's recognition of his presence.

This Mr. Arle certainly had somewhat of a shaggy appearance. Ernest at once mentally likened him to a noble Newfoundland; but had not much time to peruse the face,—pervaded by a kind of inharmonious harmony, and lightened by a pair of pleasant, mystical-looking eyes,—for its owner greeted him heartily, and lifted him down from his perch before he knew what was going to happen; then, Mr. Arle looked at him, thoughtfully, and something in his eyes went straight to the boy's heart, and took it by storm.

At Mr. Arle's call, a yellow-haired man came shyly out of the cottage, to unharness the horses and lead them to a resting-place, the carriage remaining in the road.

Linking Mr. Stanton's arm in his, and keeping Ernest beside him, Mr. Arle led the way up a lane, behind the cottages; but he soon had to moderate his pace, finding that his companions were out of breath, and Hilda and Mr. Meynard left far behind.

He stopped, and directed Mr. Stanton's attention to the glorious stretch of sea-view the spot commanded.

"I hope your daughter is a tolerable mountaineer," he said, "our wild hills are different from the thymy slopes of Wynndale."

"And they are steep enough," Mr. Meynard gasped, as he came up.

"And what desperately bad roads you have; I wonder you don't improve them," he added.

"Why, you see, they are all well enough for riding; it is very seldom that a carriage comes 'cross country the way you did to-day; the roads towards Carnkon are excellent."

"I have no doubt you will make the best of the place in every way," Mr. Stanton said; "I know you of old, and already feel in your power; if you have determined that we shall settle here—settle here we shall. But, ugh! think of the sea battling against those rocks of a winter's night, and the wind rushing down from over that wide, bare moor!"

"Seadon Cottage stands sheltered—but let us on—you see that weird sister-hood of poplars, at the house near 'The Poplars,' you shall find rest and refreshment."

"'The Poplars!' surely I know something about a place of that name," Mr. Stanton said, reflectively.

"Ay—I dare say you do: it is an experiment I make in coming to live near it," Mr. Arle spoke quickly, and then turned to talk to Ernest, leaving on Mr. Stanton's face the perplexed look of one seeking to put together remembered fragments of an old story.

A sudden turn in the road brought them full in sight of a strange pile of building—a grand old place.

It stood in a natural hollow in the hill-side; parts of

the ground round it had been cut out of the hill, and, beyond their boundary, masses of rock lay still strewn about ; that it was very long since they had been detached was evident, for they were half-buried in the ground and overgrown with mosses and lichens ; yet here and there lifted-up sharp, grey points—refused to take upon them verdant weed-garniture.

The hill behind the house was cut into terraces for some distance up ; beyond that, planted with trees, which were scraggy and stunted, and all blown in one direction by the prevalent wind, from which the house and the ground, sloping below it, were protected.

This ground, too, was laid out in terraces, those nearest the house being broad and paved, and flanked by a massive stone balustrade.

The lower walks, which had been thickly planted, were so overgrown as to be almost impassable.

The little party, approaching the building from the back, came into a spacious courtyard, kept quite neat, and yet looking ruinous. A stream, descending from a small tarn on the hill-top, entered this court through a sculptured archway in the wall, flowed on into a tazza in the centre of the east terrace, and would have been thrown up in a sparkling fountain ; but, the tazza being broken, it refused to fall down an appointed course in a series of small cascades, and, instead, poured itself over the terrace steps.

Stand beneath the gnarled old poplars in this court, in winter time, or late autumn, when they are swayed about by a roaring wind—when you see black shadows and pale, watery gleams flit alternate over the old grey pile, and

you may feel to the full the weird influence of the place. Does not an eerie sensation come over you, make your cheek cold and pale, and stir among your hair ?

Listen to the ceaseless noise of the elements, mark the scantness of signs of human life !—a faint gleam falls on those latticed upper-windows only to fade away swiftly, scared at the blankness within. Do you not creep slowly, stealthily about the place ? Does not the house look as if it had stood for ages, as if it would stand through winter-storm, summer-shine, moor-sheen and rayless night, for ages yet to come ?

Is it not a fit spot to be the scene of some melo-dramatic romance of old ;—in which sword, dagger, or poison shall play part, inducing a peroration of ghostly apparitions ;—plentifully bestrewn with dark hints of enormous crime, passionate love, and insatiable revenge ?

“A dreary place ! I am glad I am not to leave you here, Hilda,” Mr. Meynard said, as he stood in the quiet court ; saying so, he pressed closer the hand resting on his arm.

Hilda was silent ; her eyes, taking in the wild, poetic aspect of the scene, were brimful of strange, sad delight. When Ernest came to her side, put his hand through her arm silently, she felt there was unworded sympathy in that act.

“It would be glorious to live *here*,” he said, after a pause.

“Gloriously ghostly, my boy,” Mr. Meynard replied ; “but come here, Hilda—look at this garden-wilderness !” He led the way from the court into what had evidently been a rosery.

There were climbing roses trailing on the ground, many of them covered with a profusion of blossoms—Mr. Meynard picked a cluster of very dark hued flowers and gave them to Hilda. “Such a curiously rich, heavy fragrance!” she observed holding them to him.

He did not like it, he said, but he kissed the fingers that held them, and, no doubt, was about to say something pretty and appropriate; but, just then, they came upon Mr. Arle, who said.

“If you young people can condescend to partake of less ethereal food than honey and roses, perhaps you will follow me to the house.”

Mr. Meynard looked disconcerted at the interruption and at Mr. Arle’s unceremonious address—Hilda said—

“I want to know the history of these beautiful roses, Mr. Arle, who planted them and who cared for them.”

“It’s well sometimes to be content with beautiful things and not to question about them, Miss Stanton.” Mr. Arle plucked a white rose to fasten in his own button-hole and stalked toward the house, leaving the “young people” to follow.

Approaching it they saw Mr. Stanton in the porch talking to an old woman. A gleam of sunshine straggled in through a lozenged-paned window and fell on her picturesque figure; she was white capped and kerchiefed and a dark complexioned little girl, neither dressed nor looking like a cottage-child, stood by her. At Mr. Arle’s entrance this little girl left her former protector and seized his hand—Mr. Arle suffered the clasp but took little heed of the pleadingly up-turned eyes.

Hilda and Mr. Meynard were presented to the old lady

—Mrs. Danall ; then they all went through a vaulted hall into a large low room where a table was spread for their refreshment. A great fire blazed in the open hearth ; yet the room felt damp and chill, had a mouldy smell and a very sombre look, and all were glad to get out into the sunny, scented, summer air again.

The house they were to look at was about half a mile from the Poplars ; nearer Liston, the nearest post-town. Ernest petitioned to be left behind when they set off to walk to it, that he might further explore the old gardens.

Mrs. Danall stood in the porch, screening her eyes with her brown hand, and watching the elder party out of sight ; then she went into her large kitchen, through the modernized windows of which the afternoon sun poured, only flecked here and there by a straggling branch of some creeper, and set about preparing tea for her guests, chatting meanwhile to her stout assistant Nance, about the bonnie young lady and the pale gentleman to whom “the master” had said she was betrothed. The lady, Nance owned, was “well enough,” but she had seen many a better gentleman, she thought, for all this one held himself so high. Then Mrs. Danall sighed and muttered about some dead and gone “poor lamb,” who had no peer now-a-days ; about “the master” being *the* gentleman whom no young man could equal !

Seadon Cottage looked but a poor, prosaic place after the Poplars—yet it was pretty, and Mr. Arle seemed determined to show it off to the greatest advantage. Finding from Mr. Stanton’s manner that he left the decision pretty much to his daughter, Mr. Arle brought his power of persuasion to bear upon Hilda ; took her

into the garden, and pointed out its beauties ; the glorious view to be obtained from under the cedar, where a seat must be placed ; the sheltered situation of the flower-beds and the sunny aspect of the little fruit-garden.

In short, Mr. Arle won the day, in spite of Mr. Meynard's gloomy, discontented face.

The situation was very fine—the hills, rising behind the poplars, just sheltered the cottage, then fell away in a steep western slope, on part of which the garden lay ; from their base stretched away an extensive track of moor ; by crossing which Liston was reached. The cluster of fishermen's cottages—called Seadonfell—lay just beneath, on the sheltered side of a grand point. It was only in the calmest summer weather that boats dared put off from the wild coast to the west of this point, where the waves, even then, rolled in with great force.

While Hilda listened to her father and Mr. Arle's planning, and decided inwardly how two very pleasant rooms should be her father's, and that he might be very comfortable here ; Mr. Meynard, leaning against a wall, surveyed the place with a disgusted look ; would not be, or look, amiable, spite of Hilda's furtive, sad glances towards him.

While they lingered about Seadon Cottage, the sun got low, and Mr. Arle remembering that it would soon be time to speed the parting guest, proposed their returning to the Poplars.

They all agreed in praising Mrs. Danall's taste in having prepared tea for them in the kitchen—which was, indeed, only a kitchen of state—instead of in the great dull dining-room. In the deep window-seat sat Ernest

and the little girl—each curled up in a corner—Ernest intent on his own thoughts, the little girl on a book. But when Hilda entered, the large eyes of the latter were raised, and fixed steadily on her face. Noticing this, Hilda held out her hand with a smile of encouragement. After a moment's hesitation, the child clambered down and approached Hilda in a slow, dignified way, looking somewhat astonished when she was lifted up on to her knee. She sat there stiffly erect, now and then looking into Hilda's face.

Mr. Arle, pausing in the door-way to look at the two, who neither of them saw him, smiled to himself, as if something pleased him; but directly his step sounded on the floor, the child unclasped Hilda's hands from round her, and descended to go to him.

"Miss Alcina, do never forget old friends for new," Mrs. Danall remarked; and Hilda, while busy at the tea-table, could not help speculating as to the connection between Mr. Arle and this little lady.

As they were leaving the Poplars, Alcina, as she was called, brought Hilda a bouquet of garden flowers; offering them shyly, yet with dignity, and receiving a warm kiss in return. The child stood in the porch, looking after her visitors with wistful earnestness till they were out of sight. Mr. Arle went with them to bid them his hearty "God-speed ye," after they were settled in their carriage.

Fortunately, Ernest's prediction was verified—the full moon rose in a cloudless sky, and the rough ride was accomplished in safety.

It was night—the moon regnant—when they crossed

the lake—nothing but the regular splash of the oars broke the hush.

Long after Hilda laid down that night she heard the murmur of voices in her father's study. It was very late when at last doors were opened and shut; one step went down the garden, another wearily mounted the stairs. Then, invoking a blessing on both, she turned her cheek on her pillow and fell asleep; but she had strange dreams that night; in them, the Poplars, the child Alcina, the old woman, a dim ghostly presence, and Mr. Arle, played wild parts.

Next morning she was up and out early to get rid of the influence of her dream in the sunshine; but it came back upon her strongly, when she found the flowers gathered by the child from the deserted garden, lying in the dewy grass, fresh and fair. Before she had finished arranging them on the breakfast-table, Mr. Meynard came, and his presence dispelled her night-fancies. Mr. Meynard did not look as a good man coming through the glory of an early summer morning to greet the best beloved should look. Hilda noted it and said—

“You must be tired, Hendon, you were *so* late!”

“If I could have won my point,” he began, gloomily.

“And must you leave to-day?” Hilda interrupted, bending down to arrange a refractory rose.

“It is mockery in you to ask that—you know you might keep me always.”

“Has anything fresh vexed you?—did you have any letters?” Hilda asked, after a painful pause.

“No—what need of anything *fresh*. You look bright

enough for both ; my going away for so long a time doesn't trouble you."

"Hendon!"

"Hilda!" he said, but when she turned from him he would have thrown himself down at her feet willingly : just then Mr. Stanton joined them. It was not a merry breakfast party ; Mr. Stanton was looking very weary and ill ; Mr. Meynard did his best to make Hilda feel miserable ; and she grew ever paler and graver. Suddenly the young man seemed conscious that he was wasting *more* than precious time, brightened up, and, for the last hour they spent together—assumed his old witching tenderness—was the Hendon of Hilda's girlish dreams.





CHAPTER IX.

 HE last day in the old home ! That word last—
 what a strange power of pain it has !

We hear that change is an invariable element in human things—*the* element of human life. Breathing in, as native air, this atmosphere of mutability, why cannot we grow callous, careless of all change or chance ? Why cannot we learn to say this word *last* as lightly as any other ? Why, when it is so spoken, does its echo ring hollowly on the heart of speaker and hearer ?

It is a word known only to mortal lips—with God and His angels is an eternal *now* ; yet in this mortal word lies the suggestion of something infinite and absolute ; it has the attraction of mystery—can draw our thoughts into a bewildering chaos.

The last is the fragment of our present we clutch, because we feel it being sucked into the past. The past !—the things we leave behind as we press on—a something which was ours, over which we have now no control.

Yet what is ever absolutely past ? Old pains, pleasures, hates, loves, deeds, thoughts, memories—who can say, “I have done with these things ?” What is the present but an intermixture of the elements of the past—but a condition that shall be past to the future ?

Our imaginations, at least, have power over the future, none over the past—that possesses us.

Perchance we would wish to turn a page of life as the page of a book—with firm hand to press down a leaf upon which ugly thoughts and deeds are recorded—in vain ! We must read the new by the light of the old—the new phase of life is only a sequence of the one past.

So when our present is passing into this ungovernable mystery of *past*, slipping from us into this infinite vagueness, we look after it with strange, vain yearning—stretch back our impotent hands, would fain hold it a little longer, till we understand the manner of it a little better.

But life ever and always goes on and on, gliding at equal speed through lax or locked fingers, and, with mournful tenderness, we think of the *last*, which is the boundary between the present which we rule, the past by which we are ruled.

The last day in the old house ! Hilda went about with this thought heavy at her heart—conscious it lay there—sparing no time to glance at it ; many another care and pain lay beside it ; it was well she had no leisure to rouse them into consciousness by the culture of thought.

Her father’s face was a present pain to which she could not be blind ; she was awed from all expression of sympathy by its look of stern endurance ; yet longed to

fall at his feet, clasp his knees, kiss his hands, beg him to speak to her of his grief.

Some people cannot understand how a mere change of habitation can deeply pain a rational being ; some men can lightly step over a threshold, for the *last* time, even though within it they have heard a young bride singing, low and sweet, for very happiness ; have heard the wailing cry of a babe—the first born ; the merry prattling of children's voices, and ceaseless pattering of children's feet. Ay ! and, perhaps, the last faint words—the expiring sigh of one dearest—and the heavy, heavy sound that tells of the eternal covering-up—shrouding away of what was so fair—so dear !

They are philosophers, as such lose some pain, some pleasure. Mr. Stanton was not of this kind. Hilda's mother—the girl—the wife—the matron—the marble-pale corpse—she had died young, fair, and most passionately beloved—haunted Mr. Stanton to-day ; he had borne very much and very patiently, now he almost feared his strength was utterly giving way—his brain falling.

And, in sober truth, the parsonage was a haunted house, ghosts of old memories, hopes and fears starting unbidden from out many a forgotten hiding-place.

By tea-time on this last evening, Hilda could sit down, fold her hands idly, and say that the day's work was done : it was time, she looked so very weary. Mr. Stanton marked it.

“Have you heard from Meynard the last few days ?” he asked.

Hilda blushed, answering—

“No! he is hard at work, I suppose.”

After the first shower of passionate letters the few days immediately after his return to town, there had been a long pause.

Hilda was left alone in the evening, that was pleasant after the hurry of the day! she felt as she threw herself into a great chair by the window. Just before its setting, the sun came out from behind a pall of cloud, and a rich light gushed over everything, smiting her pale cheek; that reminded her of something yet to be done, she must see the sunset from the down for the last time; she was soon out and up by the old pine; then the wind, rushing upon her, reminded her of the sea. She wondered how that sunset would look from Seadon Cottage; pictured its light pouring over a heaving, stormy sea; fancied Mr. Arle standing watching it, its glow on his brow, and peering into his curious eyes, and the strange child, Alcina, watching him! these were the only congruous figures for her imagined landscape.

The last speck of the sun’s disc sank into a gulf of leaden cloud and there was no glow in the sky; a longing seized Hilda to go to one spot on the wavy upland, from which she could look down upon the Hall; a place that had been a second home to her once and that she might never see again. This desire gratified she turned home-wards to linger a while in what had been her very own garden.

It is those who love nature most deeply who most keenly feel a necessity of believing in somewhat more than she reveals. How painful it is sometimes—lingering for the last time in some peculiarly—dear and familiar spot

—to think that spring, summer, autumn will lavish there no one charm and beauty the less because our eyes will mark naught. We feel as if there were something hard, stern, repellent in this unregarding exactness of Nature's operations. If we pour out our heart's love upon her, she will give us not so much as one poor daisy to be only our own, a token of her acceptance of our devotion.

The material universe expresses *nothing* of a Father's love for each child of humanity ; it grandly demonstrates universal beneficence ; but don't we wildly crave signs of peculiar sympathizing *love* ?

Hilda felt this to-night. It grew damp and chill, a sudden gust of wind breathed round the garden—blew down some autumnal-tinted leaves and whispered weirdly among the trees. Going into the house Hilda found her father and Ernest returned.

“They must be up very early to-morrow,” Mr. Stanton said, and he hurried his tired children to bed. He looked so sad and ill that his daughter did not like leaving him alone in the dreary, dismantled room ; but he positively refused her company.

When she laid one hand on his shoulder, and stooped forward to kiss him, he removed the hand, hastily saying, “Not so, child !”—looked long at her, kissed and blessed her, then gently pushed her away.

Hilda left him with a heavy heart ; she felt she could not sleep yet, and, instead of undressing, found a further occupation ; she opened a box that contained old letters —almost all from Hendon—and looked them over, arranging them according to their dates, and sealing them up in packets.

She often paused in her employment and listened—to hear a restless step going to and fro on the bare oaken boards beneath. Once or twice she fancied she heard muttered words. The long continuance of this lonely vigil made her nervous and miserable.

Her task finished, she listened again, heard no sound, and felt frightened at the stillness. Softly opening her door, she stood a long time at the head of the stairs.

She could see no light coming from under any door, all was dark and silent—her father might be ill!—but still she hesitated, feeling shy of disturbing him. The clock in the village struck one, and she determined to wait no longer. She was very cold with dread and weariness; she wrapped a white shawl round her, and, taking her light, stole down the stairs.

The doors of the empty rooms stood open—they were all dark. Her father was not where she had left him, so she went to his study. It was dark, like the rest of the house; she pushed the door open with her foot and went in, holding her shawl round her with one pale hand, in the other carrying the light, her loosened hair falling about her white face.

Her candle gave little light; she did not at once see her father, but he was there. His arms were folded on the table, his head rested on them; the frost-touched hair falling wildly over them. Near him stood the lamp, which had burnt itself out, unheeded.

Chill awe thrilled through Hilda, she set down her light and went up to him. At her touch, when her warm breath fell on him, he stirred, looked up, smiled

strangely, stretched out his hand, and said in a tone of ineffable tenderness.

“ Again, Hilda ?” He added, feebly—“ God knows I act for conscience sake—it is hard ! I may be wrong—blind—I know—not anything. Your hand, true wife ! *You* will not blame !”

Hilda fell on her knees beside him.

“ Papa ! papa ! it is I—your child—speak to *me*—I was afraid you were ill, and came down.”

Mr. Stanton disengaged his cold hands from her clasp—passed them over his eyes—then said, faintly—

“ Is it you, child ? I thought your mother had been here !”

Hilda glanced furtively round the dim room. Mr. Stanton added—

“ I have been dreaming. Why are you not in bed ? It is late, isn’t it ?” and he half rose from his chair ; but he sank back, and a greyer ghastliness crept over his face.

Hilda flew for water, wine, bread, anything she could find first : her father drank what she held to his lips ; she bitterly reproached herself for neglect, when she remembered that he had refused to join them at the dinner-table, had, she believed, scarcely tasted food that day.

Mr. Stanton soon said—

“ I am better, thank you—I shall do very well now.”

“ Let me help you upstairs, papa ?”

“ No ! Go, child ! I will come presently.”

“ *Pray* let me help you.”

“ If you must, you must,” he said, rising.

Hilda drew his hand upon her arm, took her light, and so they went slowly up the dark, broad stairs. At his

own door he took the light from her, stooped and kissed her, saying—"God bless my dear child!" Seeing that she watched him, he turned again to add—

"Don't be uneasy—I was weak and faint—I feel well now, and shall be asleep before you—poor pale child!"

Hilda lay awake long; an awful fear she dare not recognize hovered darkly about her—a pain too deep for tears, too new for prayers was at her heart. When she fell asleep it was to dream strangely of the creeping ever nearer of the shadow of a dread.





CHAPTER X.

ATE the next day three weary and dispirited looking people sat idle in the small western parlour of Seadon Cottage.

This was a pretty home-like room ; though it had just been newly painted and decorated it had no disagreeable newness of aspect, all was done with such quiet, good taste.

Mr. Stanton was stretched on a sofa in the bow-window, looking worn but more at rest than he had done for a long time ; the table, on which stood the tea equipage, was drawn into the window, too, and the group seemed to be waiting the arrival of some fourth person : meanwhile the novel prospect, stormy sea, wild sky and undulating moor sloping away to the jagged bay, seemed engrossing, for no word was spoken till Ernest jumped up from his listless lounging and gazing with the sudden exclamation.

“Mr. Arle ! at last, Papa.”

Mr. Stanton’s face brightened almost as much as Ernest’s had done and as Mr. Arle came in, with his

firm, vigorous step, giving them a hearty welcome to their new home, he seemed to bring new life with him, to diffuse a healthy, invigorating, sea-breezy atmosphere.

Hilda felt least of this, she was weighed upon by such a load of heart weariness every new thing was sad, and strange, and the morning light had not dispelled the dread shadows that had darkened her spirit the night before — she was very anxious too for news of Mr. Meynard—the long delay sickened her.

“So there’s no knowing who your successor at Wynndale may be now, you see.” Mr. Arle was saying when Hilda roused herself out of a fit of abstraction to pour out the tea.

“I am glad the poor folk will have another change—Larne was certainly an unfit man for them—Hilda! did you hear?” Mr. Stanton asked.

“Not exactly—something about Mr. Larne?”

“His cousin is dead—the poor young man he said was being washed out at the German baths—and this Raynton Augustus Larne, and his sister share a fine estate and corresponding fortune.”

“And Mr. Larne leaves the Church”—Mr. Arle added.

“I am very glad,” Hilda said.

“Of what?” Mr. Arle inquired.

“I am glad that Mr. Larne will not settle at Wynndale; glad too, that he leaves the church, for, I should think, he did not enter it from love of the work it imposed, so he will not be much missed!” Hilda answered, rousing herself to make a longer speech, because her father’s anxious eyes were on her. After that she exerted herself to take some part in the animated conversation.

But when tea was over she stole away, leaving her father listening to Mr. Arle's cheerful talk, and went upstairs to busy herself about the further arrangement of the furniture; but this did not take long, for Hilda was always somewhat impatient of much discussion about trifles, and had a clear-sighted way of seeing at once how things would look best.

Then she wandered into the room she had chosen for her own, the one least cheerful and pretty of any; now she found it had a great recommendation, a window looking towards the Poplars; she placed her writing-table in this window, drew a chair to it and sat down.

The evening was closing in, shadows seemed to gather early round the grey pile; birds were flitting homeward over it; as she thought, how, perhaps, she should sit there hour after hour, and day after day, looking up and towards the old place, when her pen paused in its industrious scratching; seeing it in all moods of weather; she felt, what she would never have said, that it would be an inspiration to her, the local habitation of many a fair or wild-fancied story; already a halo of romance encircled it; the slight figure of the foreign child danced before Hilda's mind's eye, and round it moved other forms.

Darkness fell while Hilda mused; then she rose and stretched herself out of the window, straining her eyes to see the swaying of the weird sister-hood of poplars in the wind that had risen; she could fancy now that a faint, pale light hovered about the building; but she shut the window, shutting out her fancies, and went downstairs.

The lamp was not lighted in the parlour yet, but the fire, kindled to guard against damp, burnt brightly. Hilda saw that her father was still on the sofa, Mr. Arle by him, leaning forward ; apparently, he had been talking earnestly, but he broke off when Hilda came in.

Mr. Stanton said—“Mr. Arle has been confessing how far from disinterested his motives were when he decoyed us into this wild place. It seems, too, that it was you, more than myself, that he wanted to fix in the neighbourhood.”

“You are mis-stating the case now. I wanted you, very sincerely, because you are my friend, and—”

“My daughter, because she might be useful — complimentary, isn’t it Hilda ?”

“Miss Stanton will never find me complimentary ; so it is as well she should understand that at once.”

Hilda had seated herself, and quietly waited for an explanation.

“You remember seeing a little girl at the Poplars ?” Mr. Arle began, rather hesitatingly.

Hilda assented, secretly wondering if her imaginations and speculations were to be put an end to by some common-place explanation of who the little elf was—why there—She need not have been uneasy—no explanation was vouchsafed.

Mr. Arle said—

“I had thought of soliciting the favour of your notice for the lonely child. When I indulged the hope that you might become interested in her, I was not aware that you proposed for yourself literary occupation. Of course, that engrossing you, you won’t be inclined to spend

time or thought on my ward ; still, perhaps, you will be kind enough to see her some times — any womanly influence will be beneficial to her."

Hilda was glad of the darkness ; she felt her face flush with indignant pain at the covert sneer she found, or fancied, in Mr. Arle's tone. She did not immediately reply, and Mr. Arle added—

"Perhaps you dislike children—dread any amount of interruption—and I ask too much ; though, it seems to me, that I only point out a woman's duty for you to fulfil."

With a suspicion of what she might be feeling, Mr. Stanton answered for Hilda.

"I told Arle I was sure you would be ready to do what you could for the little creature. Whether your literary occupations will ever engross you to the neglect of practical, palpable duty, he must learn for himself. Was I right in saying you would interest yourself for the child ? "

"I think you can judge if you were," Hilda said, coldly, tears meanwhile gathering in her eyes.

Mr. Arle said—

"Alcina has been left entirely to Mrs. Danall's care since she was brought to the Poplars. Mrs. Danall is high principled and trusty, but sometimes too indulgent—and the child is passionate, spite of her demure ways. She is a great perplexity to me ; I do not pretend to understand her. But do not imagine, Miss Stanton, I want to shift any burden on to your shoulders—only, they say women know some things by instinct ; so, perhaps, without any effort, you may lastingly benefit this child."

Hilda made no reply. Mr. Stanton broke the silence that fell, by asking her to ring for light.

And when the light shone on Mr. Stanton's face, Mr. Arle rose to take his leave, advising his friend to go early to rest. At the room door he paused and said—

“Probably I may ride past Wynndale to-morrow. I have some tenants there, I hear, and think of building. If I should go, have you any commands ?”

“If you would enquire for letters—we left yesterday before post time,” Hilda said, after having waited to see if her father would remember to prefer this request, and, finding he did not, she spoke low, and without looking at Mr. Arle—she was sorry to ask a favour of him.

“I will certainly do so,” he answered cordially, “and call in ; but it may be late before I'm home.”

“What do you think of Arle, on closer inspection, child ?” Mr. Stanton asked.

“He is odd, papa ; I should think his frankness sometimes approaches rudeness.”

“Eh ? if it approaches, it never reaches—What do you mean by odd ?”

“I don't know. I do not mean anything quite agreeable.”

“He has a clear way of seeing truth ; a plain way of speaking it, that may sometimes offend squeamish people ; but I expect you, Hilda, to have sense and honesty enough to like him for that very reason.”

“I must try, then, on peril of your displeasure.”

“You won't find it difficult. Your mother was very much attached to him. He was the child of a friend of hers. When he was a young lad he was a great deal with

us : he had no near relations ; after your mother's death I only saw him once or twice. Some great sorrow came to him—all is misty to me—but when I heard him speak of the Poplars, the day we came to look at this cottage, it struck me as connected with a rumour that had reached me of his past history. He has been abroad a great deal since I saw him last."

"And he called Alcina his ward ?"

"He did ! I fancy she must be connected with his grief."

"Does the Poplars belong to him ?"

"I don't know—I fancy it is in his trust for that child—but I don't know. Arle is at once frank and reserved, and I don't like to question him, for fear of laying heavy fingers on some half-healed wound. I did express some wonder at his not living at the Poplars, and he said it had too many inhabitants for him to have any peace there."

"And that was all he said ?"

"Yes ; that old Mrs. Danall knows the story, whatever it is, I fancy. But, whoever the fairy may be, we'll do what we can for Mr Arle's protégée, won't we, Hilda ?"

"I will, papa : my heart would have prompted me to love and care for any such lonely child : I will do so *in spite* of Mr. Arle's sneering recommendation."

"Sneering !—Oh ! I remember, he did say something, rather unpleasant ; it is a pity I said anything to him about your scheme—I forgot what led to it. Now, perhaps, he will be apt to imagine literal and figurative ink-stains, and it is necessary you should be friends. But, child, if so light an allusion as that can wound you, you had better pause, and re-consider your resolution."

“No, papa, my annoyance was childish—I shall get used to such little disagreeables—if I have any power I will use it. But you have been talking too much to-night, I am afraid ; you must have your supper and go to bed.”

“Perhaps I may ! but whether it is the air, or Arle’s genial, bracing influence, I don’t know, but I feel wondrously strong to-night ; I will not be a patient long.”

“I must go and see if Ernest is asleep ; the change of room may make him restless.”

“I had almost forgotten the boy, he went away so quietly.”

“He said he wouldn’t disturb you and Mr. Arle ; he went to bed long since.”

“Ah Hilda ! ” Mr. Stanton said, when she came down stairs again, “you will show me how you can be the devoted sister, daughter, friend and many another thing besides, won’t you ? The discipline of life will quiet you down to a blissful calm, I trust—which no light wind shall ruffle.”

“You must be very patient, Papa ; there is so much to do ! I may fail in every way.”

“May God strengthen you with true strength ! And now good-night—I shall sleep more quietly than I have done for months—do you the same, you have had much weariness.”





CHAPTER XI.

ERNEST'S first thought next morning was of the Poplars ; his first anxiety, to get Hilda to go there with him ; he wanted to see Alcina again, he had found a likeness to her in one of his old books ; he was taken with her name, too, said it over softly, lingering on its sweetness.

It hardly seemed as if his wish would be gratified to-day, it was a wild, blowing morning. Every now and then clouds of rain blotted out all the view ; but then again a watery gleam would struggle forth and fall upon the dingy colour of the sea and searing hue of hill and moor, and brighten up Ernest's hopes. Then, when in the afternoon the weather quite cleared up, Hilda was busy helping her father to arrange his books, so that it was quite late when she and Ernest at last walked towards the Poplars, having left Mr. Stanton to rest.

Ernest quite thought that Seadonfell was a glorious place to live at, and the fresh wind seemed to blow away

some of Hilda's fears and cares. The near way from the cottage to the Poplars, was along a pleasant open road, from one side of which the hill rose up abruptly, fell away gradually from the other down to the very coast; the sea—lying a giddy depth below—always making some low or loud sounding on the old grey crags; the other—longer way—which became popular with Ernest, led up and down over the crests of the hill, and past the tarn, from which the stream dashed down to the Poplars.

Mrs. Danall was sitting by the sunny window in her kitchen, which was, in fact, the parlour, when they arrived; she gave them a very cordial welcome; Miss Alcy was out about somewhere, she said, and she dared say the young gentleman would like to go out too; Miss Alcy had been talking a deal about their coming—looking from her window, up above, many a time to see if the lady were on the road.

Ernest went out, and Hilda sat down in the window-seat, where the air—scented by a few late-blooming flowers—came in sweet and fresh after the rain.

Mrs. Danall observed, that it would be main pleasant for her to have Miss Stanton look in now and then, and said her little lady would come round from her shyness after a bit, and be pleased both to see her and the young gentleman.

Hilda enquired compassionately what the little lady did with herself, especially in the winter, when she could not get out.

Miss Alcina amused herself wonderfully and never seemed dull, Mrs. Danall said. Thinking it lonely for her she used to have Nance's niece come up now and

then, but the two couldn't get on together, for the cottage child was scared and stupid-like and the little lady, though kind enough, would be as cold and grand as a queen. The country-people put about stories of Miss Alcina's being a witch-child and such nonsense and so the poor dear was, in a manner shunned.

"Poor child! And what does she do when she's in doors?" Hilda asked.

"Sometimes she'll roam about singing her bits of wildly, outlandish songs—it's a wonder to me she do remember them, seeing the bit of a thing she was when her foreign nurse, that used to sing them, left her here, sometimes she'll read, read, read the long day through."

"Did you teach her to read?"

"No, the master—that's Mr. Arle, you know: he staid near by once on purpose to teach her; she used to go to him, or he come here, if the weather were bad, every day: she was very quick, she is mighty clever, the dear! and he was very patient, for a gentleman who has never had children of his own."

"Has she many books?"

"Yes—a weary many—may-be you'd like to see her rooms and things? The grand part of the house is shut up, though."

Would Alcina mind her doing so? Hilda asked—Mrs. Danall was sure she would not and led the way—she opened a door in the kitchen and they mounted a few stairs, which ended in a wide, open landing, lighted by a small, but very pretty, oriel window—an oaken balustrade and a little gate at the head of the staircase had made this a safe play place for even a very young child—the

oaken boards were partly covered with crimson cloth and the old carved chairs ranged against the wall were cushioned with the same colour. There were three steps mounting to the window, covered with cloth, too, the top one was cushioned cosily—outside the window there was a small stone balcony: “In summer weather,” Mrs. Danall said, “the young lady always curls herself up here to read—once I told her her mother used to be fond of the place,” she added low.

“Her mother!” Hilda repeated, wonderingly. As she glanced round at the sombre, rich dimness of this spot, she thought it must have a strange influence on the child, especially connected with such a memory.

“Did her mother live in this house?” she ventured to ask.

“Ay! but step in here.” Mrs. Danall opened a door on one side of the landing. “This is her proper sitting-room, a bright, cherry-looking place isn’t it? The master had it made so fresh and pretty when Miss Alcina was expected over. Here’s her book-case; and Mr. Arle gives her new books—such as he thinks fit for a young lady—now and then; but he won’t let her go into the library—and it is a dingy, dismal place! The old master was a bookish man.”

Hilda glanced at the books, selected by a just and liberal taste evidently. Mrs. Danall bustled about, grumbling—

“Dear, dear! how untidy the child is!” Picking up a garden-hat, a book, a handful of flowers, some gloves, shoes, etc., she muttered, “Like them all!—like them all! One would think a quiet child like this would be

different from my lost lamb, that was blithe as——.” But she interrupted herself to take Hilda to see the child’s sleeping-room : it opened from opposite the sitting-room, and within it was another chamber which Nance occupied — “so that Miss Alcy might not feel herself alone at night.” A necessary precaution ! Hilda thought, as she glanced round the room, in which the little bed looked a white speck. She said something of the kind ; and Mrs. Danall replied, looking significantly into Hilda’s face—

“Oh ! nothing has been seen *here*, this side of the house, but—I could tell you something strange that, mayhap, you won’t believe. Let us go down first, however.”

They went, and Hilda resumed her former seat ; for some time Mrs. Danall remained silent.

“You were going to tell me something,” Hilda suggested, inclining to hear a marvellous story about this old house.

“Ay ! it was years back, but I haven’t forgotten—I haven’t forgotten ; please God ! I shall remember when I lay upon my death-bed. It was the first night Miss Alcina lay under this old roof ; she was a poor slip of a thing—had come over seas, from Spain.”

The old lady paused, and Hilda asked,

“Was she sent to you ? ”

“To her grand-parents, who were dead and gone, and had lain under mould a year or more—only me and mine, put in by the master, lived here ; the child’s mother didn’t know that when she died ; but she learnt it after—*she* learnt it, and that was why. As I was going to tell

you, the foreign nurse who brought the child over was sent away by the master—and no wonder—and the little thing was left to me—who fitter to have her? She was a wise-like, old-like child, and took on more than we expected about the woman. We—that's me—and my good man, whom God rest, lived in the west wing of the house then, and I put the child into a small inner room, drawing her bed near the great fire I'd made, for it was winter, and the little creature came from a hot country.

“She fretted long, and it was late at night when I crept into my own bed, leaving her sweet asleep at last.

“As I lay in my bed, my heart heavy with sorrow, thinking of old times and of one lost and dead, I heard strange noises; but I went on thinking, and didn't heed them much; for since the death of the old master and mistress—Miss Alcy's grand-parents that's—I'd often heard queer sounds about and over the house, and I were used to them. I am not fearsome, Miss Stanton; I try to keep a clean conscience, and so defy the devil; but as I lay awake so long, my man snoring beside me, I gave heed to the noises, and was troubled. It was a sound of sobbing and wailing, like some one in wild, wild grief, and it grew louder, seeming to come nigher. I said to myself the child must have wakened, and be crying, and I got up—for all that, knowing at heart, that it was no child's cry I heard. I didn't get a candle, for the fire in the inner-room was bright—I went in and up to the bed; and, by its light, I saw my charge still sweet asleep; but her cheeks were wet and her lips moving, smiling, and saying words I didn't understand: it terrified me to watch her,

for she didn't look like a child, but like some grown person, sleeping and dreaming, wearied out by heart-breaking grief. Awe struck into me when, as I raised myself up from watching the child, something gave a sob close at my side! There was nothing to be seen; there was a perfect quiet for a moment, then the noises began again, as if the mourner had kept still a moment to burst into a wilder passion. I knew now from whence the sobbing and wailing came; I followed back the sound, through the room where my man slept on, into the outer room with two doors, to the door always kept locked that lead into the gallery.

“When I touched this door I found it was ajar; I said, ‘The master forgot to lock it this morning,’ he had been walking there for hours; yet a great chill came over me! he never did forget!

“When I stood in the gallery, I heard only a low, and stifled sobbing; and all was dark. I was sure there was something—some creature or spirit in trouble there. The full moon came from behind a cloud, and poured light in at the window at the south end; then I *saw* Miss Flora—my young lady—the child's dead mother—thrown upon the couch, as I had seen her there a few short years before.

“She was kneeling; her bright hair all straggled down, and hanging wild over her bare white neck and arms; her hands were clasped and held up, and her eyes raised too, she gave a cry of strong agony that went through me as I stood there.

“I spoke then—I had forgotten everything—above all, the child that lay asleep, with its strange unearthly look,

and cried to my poor lamb to come to me. *She, it*, the figure, rose, lifted its clasped hands, and with them the long hair, high up above her head, and came towards me. I opened my arms, expecting to feel the dear head laid on my bosom, but something rushed by me with a low sound ; the stir chilled me to the very bone ; I could neither see nor hear anything more. I crept back to the fire, sick and sorrow-stricken, and I lay before it till day-break, when Miss Alcina woke to fret, and I got up stiff of limb and sore of heart. Was it a sign, think you, of the poor soul's remorse at finding she had brought her father and mother sorrowing to their graves, and left her child doubly an orphan ? ”

Hilda, with a pale shiver, turned to shut the window.

“ How cold it has grown,” she said ; then added “ it was a dream, dear Mrs. Danall, a sorrowful dream out of your sorrowful thoughts.”

“ Aye, of course ! a dream !—do I walk from my bed, and throw myself down before the fire in a dream ? ”

“ And the door—the gallery-door ? ”

“ Was wide open in the morning ! as I had left it ; and yet, when I told the master of it in the morning, he, that ought to have known better, says as you do :—‘ a dream,’ he says, with a smile sadder than another’s tears, ‘ only a dream ! ’ but he owned he thought he had locked the door. I say it was *no* dream.”

“ But he, Mr. Arle, he had done no wrong ? ”

“ Wrong ! the noble heart ! he had all to forgive, Miss Stanton, nothing to be forgiven ; you know him little, or no such thought could have entered your head ! ”

“ I do know him very little,” Hilda said, with humble

submission. "But it is growing late and dusk, and I should like to see Alcina; where do you think the children are?"

Nance was despatched to call them, and they soon came in together. Hilda noticed that her delicate boy looked tall and robust beside the very slightly-made little girl; and when, in answer to an outstretched hand and welcoming smile, Alcina came to her, she remarked how very light a weight she lifted on to her knee.

Hilda smoothed the disordered black hair caressingly, and drew the upright little figure very close—Ernest standing by intently watching the two.

"I think the little girl is afraid of you, Hilda!" he decided; but the child answered, indignantly—"I am not afraid," adding, rather haughtily, "And I told you I am not little girl, but Alcina, or Alcy!" After this little speech, she lifted a very stedfast gaze to Hilda's face, and her eyes had strange, un-child-like power. They were not the kind of eyes, beautiful, independent of expression, with a beauty of the surface which we class as Italian or Spanish eyes: they had a striking individuality, once seen they didn't come back to the recollection as shining in any but the little face to which they belonged; their darkness seemed unfathomable, because they were so deeply set, and so overshadowed by black lashes.

Hilda felt almost embarrassed by their long, penetrating regard; she smiled down into them, and then Alcina said—

"Yes! I think you must be good; you are like Mr. Arle!"

“Oh! no,” Ernest cried, indignant in his turn, “my sister is beautiful and——”

“They *are* alike!” the little lady insisted, with calm dignity, as if that must end the matter. Ernest was silenced by a look from Hilda; presently, when he was out of hearing and Mrs. Danall had gone away, the child said, in a low, sad tone, her eyes still fixed on Hilda’s—

“Do you know Mr. Arle doesn’t love me?”

“Who says he does not, dear?” Hilda asked, somewhat startled.

“No one—I know it—he tries to, he is very good, it must be my fault.”

“Do you love him?”

The child looked incredulous of this question’s being put in earnest, but after a pause she only said—“I do.”

“I should think he does love *you*, then!” Hilda said.

“No, when he kisses me his lips are cold; when he takes me on his knee he never wraps his arm round me as you do.”

“You must be so very good as to *make* him love you.”

“Yes,” the child answered, in a weary tone, that made Hilda conscious how trite and unsatisfactory was this ~~uncil~~.

After that “yes,” Alcina bent from her uprightness and leant her head on Hilda’s shoulder.

“Will you come to my house sometimes?” Hilda asked.

“No, I thank you; I don’t leave home,” was the old-

fashioned answer ; though Hilda smiled, tears were in her eyes.

“ You will come if Mr. Arle wishes ? ”

“ Shall *you* love me ? ”

“ Very much, I think ! ”—and Hilda rested her check on the dark head, and encircled the little form closer and tighter.

Just then a clatter of horse’s hoofs sounded in the court-yard ; Hilda did not heed it, till she felt how wildly a little heart beat against her arm, but the child sat still.

“ Treason ! ” cried Mr. Arle’s hearty voice, “ Alcina ! have *you* deserted me ? ”

The child was soon at his side ; to-day, she was lifted up, kissed, and gently set down.

It was Hilda’s heart that began to beat wildly now, for Mr. Arle fumbled in his pockets for a letter ; it was a trembling hand she stretched out to receive it. One glance in that dim light showed her that it was from Hendon, at last.

Mrs. Danall came back to urge them to stay to tea, which she had been preparing ; but it was nearly dark, and Mr. Stanton would be waiting—so Hilda and Ernest bid good-bye to the old lady and the child, and left the house.

Mr. Arle said he would overtake them ; he soon did, and lifted Ernest on to his tall horse, walking beside him.

Hilda struggled on against the wind, which had risen fiercely at sunset, not attempting to keep pace with Mr. Arle’s great strides, or hear what he and the boy were talking about, but thinking, sometimes of Mrs. Danall’s

story, oftener wondering what might be the contents of her precious letter.

When they reached the cottage, Mr. Arle jumped Ernest off, and strode away; saying that he could not come in, as he must see his tired horse cared for, and then had a long evening's work before him.





CHAPTER XII.

The Stanton family seemed that the Stantons were to know at once how fiercely winter sometimes sets in on the coast near Seadonfell. For weeks the weather continued wild; the sea, lashed into fury, sounded terrifically; dashed its spray far up over the broken rocks on to the turf beyond, and even threatened the fishers' cottages clustered to leeward of the point.

The poplar trees near the old house had stood quiet in early autumn, looking like a group of golden flames; but in one fierce night they were stripped, and in the morning showed bare as the frame-work of an illumination, its lamps burnt out.

At Seadon Cottage no one heeded the weather much. Mr. Stanton was at work; when he did notice the strife, and tumult without, he said he liked it, that it at once stirred and soothed him, set his thoughts to grand music. Mr. Arle had lent Ernest Scott's novels, and he was devouring them, for the first time; constantly absorbed reading, or illustrating, or, when it was too dark for

either, dreaming about them. Mr. Arle himself was away; he was always an active man, energetically lending a hand to any good work.

And Hilda? Well, she was quiet enough; and, after months of anxiety and trouble, she should have enjoyed this quiet, but she found herself not happy enough to do so; and all cause for anxiety was by no means removed.

After passing weeks sitting alone, engaged with her needle-work—in the pauses of storm without, feeling the silence within death-like—she saw that this life wouldn't do. Thoughts, followed long and far, leading apparently no whither, became tormentors—she grew nervous and irritable.

Why should she not do as she had proposed? Why not begin to write? There was no reason save that she felt no heart for the effort. But, she thought, she must in some way break through the forest of enchanted barriers growing round her—break out of the dull, morbid listlessness heavy upon her.

So, standing at the window, watching the driving rain, one morning—when Mr. Stanton had already gone into his study, and Ernest was stretched on the ground with his books, paper and pencil—Hilda reproached herself with the wasted, long, leisure days left behind, and resolved to indulge her idle, dreary mood no longer.

She went to her room, drew her table to that window overlooking the Poplars, and resolutely set herself to gather together long-garnered-up *matériel*. At last, the pen was dipped in ink, to fly swiftly over page after page of her paper.

Was it to be expected that she should remember exactly

how minutes, hours, flew this first morning of the tasting of a new delight ?

Of course she was startled when the servant came to say that dinner and her father were waiting : she flew down without pausing to look if her hair were smooth, her collar neat, her hands free from ink-stains.

She entered the room with more hurry than was often seen about her now ; an apology on her lips. Mr. Arle was there, she felt how deeply she blushed when as she gave him her hand, both his eyes and her own were attracted to the blackened second finger. Mr. Stanton, noting both the blush and its cause, smiled gravely. Hilda's face wore a haughty look when its colour paled : she resented something in Mr. Arle's manner greatly.

That afternoon came the first brightening in the weather ; it was calmer and finer than it had been for weeks. Hilda asked Ernest if he would go out with her ; —she had to repeat her question ; then the boy gave a great sigh, looked up from his book and out, and answered with a resigned “yes.”

“Going out, to the Poplars, Hilda ?” Mr. Stanton asked, “if so, we'll walk there together.”

Hilda stood by the window, only Ernest could see her face, he answered—

“I don't think Hilda was going to the Poplars.”

“Where then ?”

“To Liston”—Hilda said, turning round—“to ask for letters—Ernest knows the way.”

“Is it post-day ? You had better be off at once, then, it is a long way, and the afternoons are short now—Arle,

you and I will walk together—can we get down close to the sea?"

"Yes; but there will be a deafening uproar; full-orchestral power is our sea-side music this rough weather. Listen!" he threw up the window. "Ernest, you had better take your sister the upper road, nearest my house, it's more sheltered. You remember the way, I hope—it's a long way, but I suppose Miss Stanton prefers going to sending."

Hilda was soon ready to start. She and Ernest thought the wind glorious, and took the upper road out of deference to Mr. Arle's advice, not from preference: it was a long walk; but they battled on bravely.

The post-office was at the nearer end of straggling Liston; so they had no occasion to explore its streets.

There was a letter for some one of the name of Stanton! Hilda's heart sickened: it was for her father, addressed by a strange hand. There was no other? No! She turned homeward; weary now, ready to find the way rough and long.

"Did you expect a letter from Hendon?" Ernest asked, after walking beside her, in silence, some time.

"Yes, dear."

"He ought to have written, then!"

"He may not have been able."

"Do you think he cares about us much, now?"

"Do not you?"

"I think he loved you, when he was at Wynndale; perhaps he easily forgets when he is away."

"Men often do, people say."

"Any one worth your loving, wouldn't, Hilda—I

shouldn't; papa and Mr. Arle wouldn't," Ernest said, warmly.

"You do not know that Hendon does: he may be ill, or busy."

"I think if I were dying, knew some one who loved me was wearying to hear, I should write: no 'business' *could* prevent me."

"You are young, and do not understand."

"You don't want me to talk about this, and I won't. But I do understand—more than you think."

As they approached the Cottage, they met Mr. Stanton and Mr. Arle, who had just mounted the steep path from the Point.

"A letter for you, papa," Hilda said giving it to him.

"What news have you?"

"Not any," she answered, and went on quickly. Mr. Arle left Mr. Stanton to read his letter, and joined Hilda.

"The weather has not permitted you to make many visits to the Poplars lately!" he said, "or to see much of our neighbourhood."

"I don't think the weather has prevented my going to the Poplars," Hilda said, frankly.

"What then? want of inclination; or, your other engagements?"

"I really don't know what, but certainly not my other engagements," she answered, impatiently. "I have been very idle."

"Perhaps, in my zeal for Alcina I went to work awkwardly—had better have left you to make voluntary advances?"

"It would certainly have been better."

“Because you are proud, and easily offended ?”

“Perhaps so.”

“But those are faults, and you should conquer them.”

“Perhaps I try to do so.”

“Then I hope you may succeed ; will you let me use a friend’s privilege ? You see, I am your father’s friend ; we shall have to be a good deal together !”

“I suppose we shall ! What is this friend’s privilege ?—something disagreeable ?”

“To find fault.”

“A privilege only a *friend* should use,” Hilda smiled, in spite of herself.

“We can try to be friends, if you please, Miss Stanton.”

“If you please, Mr. Arle ; but don’t abuse the right you are anxious to claim ; for I am not very patient, and being found fault with is only good for those who also receive praise and encouragement.”

The sadness Mr. Arle had, perhaps, been trying to dissipate, came back into Hilda’s face very soon.

Mr. Stanton came up as they entered the cottage.

“Did you know that Meynard had been staying some time at Newton, with his mother and sisters ?” he asked her. “My letter is from an old friend—a Mr. Boynton—from whom I have not heard for years ; he has lately had tidings of me through Hendon, whom he met down there ; Mrs. Boynton is a confirmed invalid, and fancies she derives benefit from Newton air ; did you know Hendon had been there ?”

Mr. Arle had stayed outside with Ernest. Hilda answered, reluctantly—“I did not know it—it is some-

time since I heard," and went quickly up-stairs, to avoid further questioning.

When she had taken off her bonnet and cloak, she still lingered ; threw herself on the sofa with a feeling of intense weariness, amounting, for a moment, to a longing to give up the whole battle of life ; but Hilda soon conquered such weakness ; rose resolute and went down.

When tea was over, Mr. Arle asked Hilda to play ; he had never done so before, though he had spent many evenings with them.

She looked up in some surprise ; she believed that Mr. Arle disliked music ; did not think he would ask her merely out of politeness, so, perhaps, it was to amuse her. She was grateful for the kind motive ; but would far rather have been left alone—Her piano had not been opened since it had stood in the parlour of Seadon Cottage, because she had felt no heart to play ; she was specially disinclined to-night.

Mr. Arle's request sounded somewhat like a command—but Mr. Stanton said "do Hilda !" so she rose to obey.

Ernest lifted his head from his book at the first sound ; then left it altogether, and crouched down in the corner close to the piano.

Mr. Stanton, looking over Hilda, asked for one old favourite after another, whenever she paused ; and Hilda herself, as she went on, forgot all associations of pain and sang and played, enjoying the unwonted excitement.

Mr. Arle kept his seat near the window ; his eyes gloomily fixed, his mouth set resolutely and his arms folded, he looked a picture of stern endurance ; but the place where he sat was dim, the candles had been put on

the piano, and no one heeded him ; till at last, Hilda rose, saying that she feared she must have tired out his patience.

Then after a few abrupt remarks he took his leave.

“Mr. Arle looks strange to-night,” Ernest remarked.

“Your music has brought on one of his dark moods, I fear, Hilda,” Mr. Stanton said.

“I did not know, I should not have thought, Mr. Arle was subject to moods,” she answered negligently.

Neither she nor her father guessed the storm of passionate feeling beating in the great heart, as Mr. Arle, the Cottage door closed behind him, stood still a moment, taking a deep inspiration of the wildened night, then strode off into the dimness—not towards home.

Mr. Arle had avoided music for years—it could affect him so deeply that, with a man’s impatient pride, he pretended to dislike it ; on this account the Liston ladies considered him a barbarian and, those who could, quoted Shakespere about a man with no music in his soul ; but Mr. Arle was very calmly indifferent to their hard epithet and their quotation.

This night he either thought that music and memory had lost somewhat of their power ; or, he made a great sacrifice for the sake of a sad face.

The night was not very dark, for the wind-driven clouds were thin, and they could not always keep back the light of the moon, over whose pale face they hurried. Mr. Arle plunged down the rugged hill-side, straight down to the shore, in a way that one might not too safely descend that rocky track at broad noon : one false step might have been death, but he sprang safely upon the rock-strewn beach, among the fishing boats and nets.

His feet had trodden this rough nook morn, noon, and night—at intervals of years, or only days, how often, and how often !

The mighty waves were rolling in grandly now. The tide was rising ; the wind drove them on fiercely, and shortened Mr. Arle's promenade : he threw himself upon a fragment of rock and watched how the wild water came on and on, threatening his position.

Ever and anon the crests of the waves caught a gleam of light from the struggling moon and glittered spirit-pale. Gusts of wind caught the spray, and sent it over Mr. Arle in showers ; he noticed this by turning his face full towards it.

As he lay so, watching the pale lights, and the awful shadows that followed them blackly, listening to the mighty roaring round him, of what was Mr. Arle thinking ?

Memory is ofttimes a fair and gentle ghost ; but Regret is a fierce, foul fiend—impotent for good, potent for ill !

Imaginings of what might have been, and a bitter sense of wrong and loss, filled the heart that throbbed beneath the night as tumultuously as the wild sea itself.

While Mr. Arle stayed there, the desolate shore grew to be weirdly haunted—remembered words sounded clear above the bewildering noise—remembered eyes looked strangely at him from among gleam-lighted grey rocks ; a past intensity of love, hate, and grief came upon him armed in unholy might.

He looked out over the striving waste of water with tranced eyes. A transparent cloud veiled, but did not

hide, the moon ; on, towards him, very swiftly, came a shadowy somewhat. “I am not worthy of you, Lyon !—Dear Lyon, I am not worthy of you !” he heard said by a low voice, broken by many sobs. Nearer, closer, it came : he opened his arms in strange, vague expectations ; the crest of a billow fell chill upon him !—his rock was washed over by the water !

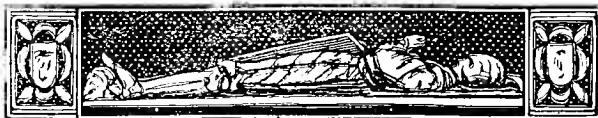
Mr. Arle rose—it was time he should—there was a mocking smile on his lip : he was in no meek mood to-night ; he spoke aloud, and said—“Right, oh, Nature ! bitter, salt, and cold !—a shadowy thing, wind-driven and tempest-tost !”

But he gave the lie to that scoff as soon as it was uttered. The water was dripping from his hair—even his rough coat was saturated. He retreated higher up upon the beach, paced to and fro awhile, crushing the wet shingle noisily beneath his feet. His was a good and a strong nature ; whatever he had borne he had borne nobly ; he despised himself for indulging such moods as these ; regret and bitterness never possessed him long.

So, soon his spirit was the quietest thing abroad ; listening to catch the voice of God above the tumult of nature. It was past midnight when Mr. Arle reached home : his household were accustomed to his irregular ways ; he enjoyed a glorious independence.

No weary eyes were watching, no anxious ears listening for his return ; he had to fear the questioning of no love-quickenèd glances.





CHAPTER XIII.

HEN, after a stormy winter, the early spring gently insisted upon having its advent recognized, Hilda, while she welcomed it, looked back wonderingly—how the dreaded winter had sped!

Yet there had been anxieties enough to lengthen its course, and the scrutinizing spring sun showed its mark upon her face.

That brand might have been deeper on brow and breast, had one grief only pressed it down steadily; but it had not been so.

Hendon's letters had been few and brief; they had given far more pain than pleasure.

Mr. Stanton had been ill—an illness brought on by over-work. Hilda was thoroughly roused from introspection. When no other duty called her, she wrote—working on steadily, and somewhat secretly—preparing herself for a possibility she did not dare contemplate. One little success and her ardent desire to help those dearest, gave her courage, and she began a book. Perhaps,

this occupation was somewhat dangerous; for, oftentimes she wrote with a passion so strong, it was strange how her eyes could look so calmly on what she set down; from so intense an experience that how it had been evolved from so still a life as hers was inexplicable; but, it is said, that “the arrow dipped in the marksman’s blood, unfailingly reaches the mark;” perhaps it is as true that the blood winging the arrow is the poison-blood of the heart; that gone, pain rankles there no more.

Alcina had been at the Cottage a great deal through the winter. Hilda had won a second place in her heart; the child was content to be with her, following her about, or sitting by her, breathlessly quiet, when she was occupied. At first Hilda had found it somewhat painful to be watched so intensely by unchildlike eyes, as Alcy watched her; more so to see a naturally passionate child so restrained and quiet, but she grew used to it, finding that the little girl was really happy with her.

Mr. Arle had been away from Seadonfell a great deal at intervals, and Hilda’s heart had often ached for Alcina, who, perhaps for weeks, would watch and long for a sight of her friend, only to shrink back to Hilda with a look of old, old pain on her face, when the meeting came, at last, and she only received a smile, nod, and a few carelessly-kind words; after one such meeting, Alcina had been missing for hours, and Hilda had found her, after long searching, crouching on the ground among some shrubs in the garden; traces of passionate weeping on her face, but quiet then, her little hands clasping her knees—her glittering eyes looking far away, full of hopelessness.

Sometimes Hilda thought she would speak to Mr. Arle about the child ; but she was afraid, feeling that some mystery of pain connected and divided the two, that she had no right to interpose.

On the evening of a fair May day, Mr. Arle presented himself at the Cottage, after a week or two's absence. He was very warmly welcomed, but his face wore what Ernest called its storm-look. Hilda's kind hand led forward Alcina's shrinking figure, and Mr. Arle *did* stoop and kiss the child to-day ; seeming, by the rush of blood to his face, as if he understood the implied reproach of Hilda's gesture ; she did not notice this.

Mr. Arle had not been at the Cottage very long before he said to Mr. Stanton, in his abrupt way—

“I am going away—to Spain—I leave here again to-morrow, and may be away a long time.”

Very sincere expression of sorrow followed this announcement. Disregarding questions from Mr. Stanton and Ernest, Mr. Arle only seemed to hear Hilda say, very low—

“We shall miss you very much—Alcina will, I know.”

“Come here, Alcina,” he commanded.

She came, was lifted on to his knee, sat there erect and silent—using no loving, child-like demonstration—not throwing her arms round his neck, clasping his hand, or even looking up into his face—showing no signs of the great grief swelling her heart.

How hardly the child had learnt such self-restraint, no one knew ! Perhaps it was well that the southern element of fire and passion in her nature should thus early feel the chilling influence of the ice of northern

reserve ; at all events, Mr. Arle had thought it so. She knew if he loved her, it would be when she was "good," quiet, so the intensity of her devotion checked its expression.

This was a severe ordeal now ! child as she was, she was conscious of it, and called up all her self-command. Sitting there, that arm round her, how the little heart throbbed and swelled ! Mr. Arle did not speak to her immediately, and, as she sat silent, her greatest dread was that the tears gathering beneath the long lashes, might fall on his hand.

"Did you hear that I am going to Spain, Alcina ?" Mr. Arle asked.

The child bowed her head—a gesture that had become a constant habit when she first came to England ; she used it now because she would not trust herself to speak.

"And you are very sorry ?" he continued.

Another nod, accompanied by a choking sound between a sob and a sigh.

"Will you be very good while I am away, Alcina ?"

She forced herself to speak, and said—"I'll try."

"You must conquer your temper more yet—*never* be wild and passionate."

"I *will* try."

Mr. Stanton was talking to Hilda and she did not hear this dialogue, or she would have tried to interrupt it. Mr. Arle continued, speaking more tenderly than he often did, to her.

"Look up, little Alcy ! I am sorry to leave you, child ; I am going away because it is my duty—a duty I owe you. Tell me that when I am gone you will remember

what I have said—it may be long before I have this little girl on my knee again—look up and tell me so."

Alcina tried to look up, to answer. This was just too much. She broke into a long-restrained passion of grief, throwing herself upon Mr. Arle's breast, clinging to him, crying that—"Indeed, indeed he must not go!"

Mr. Arle looked pained, perplexed, displeased—put the child down from off his knee.

"What *is* the matter with her?" he asked, appealing to Hilda, who came up hastily and took Alcy in her arms. She answered, hotly, confronting him with flashing eyes and heightened colour—

"You might know! the poor child loves you! Your going away pains her—your coldness tortures her. You can't expect a little creature like this to be as self-restrained as a woman might!"

"Alcina takes a strange way of showing her love; she knows I hate crying, think such passion sinful," Mr. Arle said, coldly.

Hilda carried the child away, upstairs; she was so slightly made, she was no heavy burden. There the wild grief, which had been stayed a moment burst out afresh; yet once she paused again, gasped out—"Can *he* hear me?"

Hilda tried in vain to soothe her, as she would any other child; then she began to reason with her, to speak of patience and resignation, as if she had been talking to a woman. Alcina listened—after a while, grew quiet. Evidently she was wearied out, and let Hilda undress her and put her to bed.

Hilda sat by her, holding her hand, till she fell asleep.

At first, the watcher's heart was full of resentment towards Mr. Arle, had pity only for the child ; but, after a time, thoughts came that softened her—she could pity both ; she called to mind that Mrs. Danall had said that Mr. Arle had everything to forgive, nothing to be forgiven, in reference to the sad story concerning Alcy's mother ; then her cheek flushed with shame as she recalled her hasty words. Alcy slept soundly, the grasp of the hot little fingers relaxed, and Hilda went down stairs, feeling somewhat of a culprit.

Ernest was alone in the parlour.

“Where are papa and Mr. Arle ?” she asked.

“In the study. Mr. Arle looked very sorry about Alcy, Hilda ; I think what you said hurt him, and he had been speaking to her very kindly.” Ernest spoke reproachfully.

“I was too hasty,” Hilda answered, as she sat down and took up her work. “But that poor child suffers so much !”

It was late when Mr. Arle came out of the study, and he was going away immediately ; but Hilda, feeling as if she must know how angry he was with her, asked—

“Shall we see you again before you leave, Mr. Arle ?”

He stopped, looking somewhat surprised, answered—

“I hardly know—if I have time. On second thoughts, I *shall* come up. Have you any commands ?”

“Instead, I want yours.”

“Mine !—about what ?”—and he came and stood close opposite her.

“About Alcina.” Seeing his clouding look, she went on, hastily—“I want to do anything I can for her. I

wish you would tell me what, definitely. What you would like her taught, and — ”

“ You remember we settled that I made a mistake once, for which I owe you an apology ; I should make a second, if I in any way interfered—rather, I ought to thank you for what you have done already.”

“ No ! I have done it out of love for Alcina ; I want no thanks. But you haven’t satisfied me. Mr. Arle,” she went on timidly, “ I do want to see the poor child happy, to help to make her so—to help to make her what you wish to see her.”

Mr. Arle’s eyes fell from their looking straight into hers, he said—

“ Do not fear—you will do that without effort.”

“ You are provoking, Mr. Arle, for once I wanted commands laid upon me, and so — ”

“ And so they shall be,” he interrupted ; “ give me credit for having in my heart more tenderness for Alcina than I can show ; do what you can to make a true, *strong*-hearted woman of her ; and,” he added, with somewhat of compassion in his tone, “ take care of yourself ; keep as happy as you can ; and beware—of too much ink ! ”

Mr. Arle was gone. Hilda sat working and thinking a while, with a warm colour on her before-pale face, then went to seek her father, whom she found with an open letter before him, and a gloomy look on his face.

“ Sit down here, Hilda, I want to talk to you. I have a letter from our dear friend, Mrs. Meynard,” Mr. Stanton said, when Hilda had obeyed him ; “ will you read it, child ? ” he added, “ it will pain you ! ”

Hilda's heart trembled as she stretched out her hand to take it ; but she read it through without other sign of emotion than a slight smile of scorn on her lip, and when she laid it down, asked quietly—

“ Well ! papa ? ”

“ Nothing is well in that ; you must answer my questions ; did you know that Meynard had concealed the result of his visit from his mother—had not told her of your re-engagement ? from this you see plainly that he has done so.”

“ I did not know it before.”

“ Had you never inquired if Mrs. Meynard were aware of it ? ”

“ Yes ; but Hendon did not answer the question. Papa, he may have done so to spare us annoyance from his mother's anger.”

“ Hilda ! it is a proof of very contemptible cowardice ; knowing Mrs. Meynard, as I do, I don't pay much heed to her hints of the probability of her son's settling most desirably soon, to anything she hints about that Miss Larne, but I do think that his having concealed his position with regard to you, and he cannot have done so without weak prevarications, together with what I hear of him from other sources, proves him quite unworthy the trust I reposed in him. I have loved him for his father's sake, struggled to think well of him ; but, Hilda, you must be prepared for my forbidding any further intercourse between you ! Do you hear, Hilda ? ” he added, for she sat so still, looking so quietly into the fire, she hardly seemed to heed.

“ I do, papa,” she said slowly, without turning.

"Will you be ready to obey, if I should see fit to bid you write and tell him that all is over between you, for ever; that, for the future, you hold yourself free?"

"Free!" Hilda echoed.

"Aye; shall you be ready to obey?"

Hilda gazed a little longer steadily into the fire, a look of determination gathering on her face.

"Papa!" she said, turning to him now; "once you called me brave, and trusted me; have I forfeited your trust? Must I promise, blindly and rashly, without thinking or praying?"

"I do not want you to do anything rashly."

"We cannot do anything, papa, but wait; because we made a promise: *you* promised to be patient with Hendon for two years; one has not passed yet, and we have no reason to—I mean, he may release us—but we cannot free ourselves."

"If confidence I place is abused, I have a right to remove it. It is likely I shall forbid your correspondence, in spite of your reasoning, daughter. Do you often write?"

"Only when I hear from Hendon—that's not very often."

"That is right—do no more than answer his letters. How long is it since you last heard?"

"More than a month."

"Well! it is no use regretting the past; nevertheless, I do regret that this connection was renewed—that you have this harassing doubt and anxiety, instead of being at rest on a certainty. Mrs. Meynard was, in her generation, wise."

"There certainly is rest in certainty," Hilda said; "but——:" there she broke off. From Mr. Stanton's manner she could see that he was much disquieted; but he said no more: she returned to her fire-gazing, and a disagreeably stern expression settled on her mouth; perhaps it was only determination to bear a position painful to her pride.

When she had bid her father good night, gone to her room, where Alcy slept quietly, she continued her thinking far into the night mournfully—she wondered when and how the end of her suspense would come: she paid little heed to anything Mrs. Meynard said, she had had cause enough for dissatisfaction in Hendon's own brief and few letters, she bitterly grieved over his want of true manliness; she had felt this want more than ever lately, by force of contrast possibly. Her love for him had always been unselfish; he had taught her to believe herself necessary to him; if this belief were destroyed why—but she would not think of that. Anyway it seemed to her that love brought much pain and weariness—yet perhaps—did she rightly know what love was—the love of love? had it ever been fully aroused in her? was it like the calm, reasoning, *sorrowing* affection she felt for Hendon? Dared she ask such questions? not consciously, and, at any rate, she dared not answer them.





CHAPTER XIV.

HILDA slept later than usual next morning: Alcy had managed to dress herself and glide down stairs without rousing her. Mr. Arle came, all on purpose to say some last words to the child, for he was gone again before Hilda was ready.

The pleasure this visit all to herself gave Alcina, softened the sorrow of leave-taking: she must go home that very morning, she said, to execute some commissions Mr. Arle had given her, and to see some new presents he had made her; she was very impatient, and Ernest was very busy, so Hilda set off with her.

The morning was so fair and sweet that Hilda felt an uneasy sense of having lost something most precious when she remembered that she had passed several such mornings as these, at work in a sunless room, not heeding if it rain or shone—Well perhaps she enjoyed this delicious day all the more, with its fresh, fragrant, gay glitter, and soft streaky sky whose grey and blue were mirrored in the calm sea: her little companion was very quiet, only now

and then singing low to herself, a bar or two of a quaint Spanish song, with a refrain of “Spain, Spain, beautiful Spain.”

Both Alcy and Hilda were warmly welcomed by Mrs. Danall—Alcina submitted to the old lady’s caresses pretty patiently—then ran off to her own room. Mrs. Danall detained Hilda; she wanted to consult her about her little charge’s wardrobe; her dark winter frocks were too warm now and she had quite out-grown last summer’s things. Then she must have new frocks, Hilda said, knowing that the expense was no consideration; wondering what Mrs. Danall’s perplexity was about.

Mrs. Danall shook her head, came close to Hilda, laid her hand on her arm, and said—

“Any day news may come from over seas that Miss Alcina is an orphan.”

“I thought she was an orphan now?”

“Aye, so she is; the master has been the real father to her.”

“Well, but Mr. Arle is not ill, is he?”

“Mr. Arle, the master, ill! No, thank God!—it is the foreign man—the young lady’s father—who is dying; and I know the master will please to have the child wear mourning.”

“Oh!” Hilda said, relieved and perplexed; “then Alcina’s father is living, in Spain, but ill, and Mr. Arle is gone to him! He and Mr. Arle were friends, then! I thought——”

“Friends!—no, never, Miss Stanton!”

“I do not understand. Is Mr. Arle gone to Alcy’s father?”

“Aye, that is he!—the master knows that we are to forgive our enemies, and to do good to those who have injured and hated us—the dying man sent for him, and he’s gone.”

“That is noble of him!” and this was the man to whom she had spoken scornfully, passionately, the night before!

“Does Alcina know why Mr. Arle is gone to Spain?”

“He would tell her, he thought. The sense of that little darling is wonderful, Miss Stanton! Once she questioned the master about her father and mother, and he didn’t quite hide that it pained him to talk of them; so, when he was gone, I called her to me—a tiny slip of a thing she was—and told her all was well for her to know, and bade her not speak about those things to Mr. Arle again. She listened, with her great shining eyes full upon my face, seemed to learn it all by heart, for she hasn’t asked a question since, and, I see, she remembers every single word.”

“Poor child!”

“Not so poor, either—for money, she’s rich enough, and Mr. Arle is father enough for any child; yet she is but a motherless thing!”

“But, Mrs. Danall,” Hilda said, timidly, “why doesn’t Mr. Arle take Alcina with him? It doesn’t seem right that she shouldn’t see her dying father.”

“I dare say it doesn’t! But you don’t know; you can’t judge. It was the mother’s dying wish that the child should be taken from the father—sent to England. They foreigners are superstitious; he feared my pretty dear’s haunting him, if he disobeyed, though his friends

tried hard to make him keep her. They wanted to make a Roman of her, put her in a convent, and have the money. Oh, but it's a weary, wicked world, Miss Stanton ! Some day, though, doubtless, the master will take Miss Alcy to see her parents' graves and her country—which people say is well enough !”

“ Alcina has relations on her father's side, then ?”

“ Ay ! God shield her from them. It is to shield her rights, to see that cunning priests don't defraud the dying man, that the master is wanted ; though he would gladly let them have all, and only keep her English land and English gold for my little lady.”

Just then Alcina came in, all eager haste and delight. Hilda must come and see her new treasures—Hilda had much to admire ; had to agree with Alcy that Mr. Arle was very, very good and kind ; she turned hastily from the child's look, because her eyes filled with tears.

Mrs. Danall called upstairs to remind Alcina to ask Miss Stanton if she would like to see the house—it being a great honour and trust conferred on Alcy by Mr. Arle, that some of the keys had been left in her charge. Alcina was still engrossed by the examination of new picture-books, brought from London for her ; Hilda took the keys and wandered away.

Lest Mrs. Danall should offer to pilot her, Hilda avoided the kitchen, and, by Alcy's direction, passed through the great dull room, where they had dined on their first visit, into the hall. There she had some difficulty in opening the heavy oaken door in the carved screen, that shut it off from the grand staircase. At the head of this grand staircase there was a somewhat similar, but much larger,

place to that in Alcy's nook, having a great bay-window, of small diamond-shaped panes of painted glass in it.

Hilda paused, then opened another heavy door, which led into the west wing of the house and closed behind her with a dull, dead sound ; she was in a long room—the gallery she fancied—on one side it had narrow windows, which gave little light from the thickness of the wall in which they were set ; on the other several doors ; it was massively furnished ; had a great fire-place in it, round which were grotesquely-carved figures, which grinned at Hilda as she past them, and at the far end a bay-window, like the one at the head of the stairs.

The daylight fell upon the faded glory of purple and gilding of a couch standing in this window ; Hilda sat down upon it.

A curious thrill went through her, as she remembered that this must be where Mrs. Danall had seen the apparition of that dead Miss Flora ; that within one of those closed doors had slept the child with the strange smile on its face.

How chill the place felt ! Hilda rose with a paled cheek to pace thoughtfully up and down ; to picture to herself a bright and beautiful young creature, the light and life of a household, the one chosen out by Mr. Arle's love ; then to wonder mournfully what serpent had entered this Eden, poisoned its innocence—its bliss.

Tired of this cold gallery, Hilda opened the door nearest its south end, and found herself in the great drawing-room ; this room was full of dusky sunshine from its many southern windows. Hilda tried to open one of the many casements ; but in vain ; evidently they had

not been opened for years. She wandered about noting everything ; the curiously-carved cabinets ; the row of grim faces set in medallions, forming the cornice ; and the quaint devices of the groined ceiling. In one corner of the room hung a curtain ; drawing that aside she came into a smaller room, left, save for the thick-lying dust, as it had been used but an hour ago. There was an elaborately-inlaid old piano here ; a harp, beside which lay its covering, apparently just thrown off. There were music-books scattered about confusedly. On the table lay books ; Hilda opened one to find inscribed on its first page—"Flora, from Lyon Arle," and a date, that very day fourteen years ago !

Hilda found many another suggestion of the story of the past—Through a cleared space in the window she looked out over the spring-veiled desolation of the old terraced walks ; out to the quiet-lying sea, and thought of others who had looked out there : tears came into her eyes, fell, drop by drop, heavily and unheeded, as more bitter and more sweet tears had, doubtlessly, fallen there before.

Something touched the hand hanging at her side, something soft and warm and she started :—smiled that she had done so, as she looked down upon Alcina's face.

"Why are you crying ?" the child asked. Hilda kissed the wondering eyes and answered.

"Was I crying ? I hardly knew it ; I was thinking about sad things."

"Would Mr. Arle be angry if he saw *you* crying ?"

"I don't know." Hilda said smiling. "Very likely."

"I don't think he would, he likes you very much."

“ You are wrong there, my child ; but how long had you been by me, Alcy ? ”

“ Not long—I came softly in, I couldn’t make a noise here ! but what sad things were you thinking about ? ”

“ Cannot you tell ? ”

“ Perhaps.”

“ Do you often come here ? ”

“ No, I have only been here once before : Mr. Arle brought me—you know my pretty mama lived here once and these are her things—her books, her music.” And Alcy went softly about, touching this and that and murmuring to herself.

Hilda watched her awhile.

“ Now let us go,” she said when the child returned to her side, “ we will close the rooms again—I will see the rest another day—come now out into the garden, I want some of those white flowers that there are such clouds of.”

Hilda stopped a few minutes with Mrs. Danall before she followed Alcina, and it was some time before she could find the little girl when she went out—at last she came upon her in a shady nook, so busy gathering the white flowers that her dark head was bent amongst them ; they were tangled in her hair.

“ Must you go now ? ” was asked, regretfully, as the fragrant nosegay was given to Hilda.

“ I must, Alcy, but you shall come to me again as soon as you please, and, I have thought of one thing you can do that Mr. Arle would like.”

“ What is that ? ” was asked, eagerly.

“ Why, you must sit down quiet to work sometimes,

instead of always reading, or rambling about ; then, when you have learnt to work well, you might ask Mrs. Danall, or Mr. Arle's housekeeper, to give you some work to do for him."

"That would be pleasant—but I cannot do anything but prick my fingers—but I'll learn ! Mrs. Danall can't see if I work well or no, she will say 'it's beautiful, my dear !' anyway ; but I'll ask Mrs. Bryan, who is very strict."

And after bidding Hilda good-bye, Alcina went into the house, flew up to her room, to seek in her much-neglected work-box, materials for practising the mystical art.

Hilda loitered and often looked back on her homeward way—back at the grey old pile—upon whose roof the sun shone so brightly, bringing out the brilliant hues of ferns and lichens, growing there luxuriantly ; back at the old poplar trees, swaying in the light breeze, nodding and beckoning, hinting mysteriously of some wild story they could tell.





CHAPTER XV.

MR. STANTON had a letter from Mr. Arle, written a few days after his arrival.

Alcina's father had a name in Mr. Arle's letter—Castello. "Castello is evidently dying, yet has rallied since my coming. I must stay till the poor fellow dies. I loathe this luxurious land, this fierce, bright Spain; there is nothing like an English moor, or an English shore!"

So wrote Mr. Arle, and this was the one expression of impatience that escaped him. It was a strange, wild thing, that the very man whom he had in some way deeply injured, should be watching by this Spaniard's death-bed, protecting him against his friends; there must be nobility in the nature so trusting, as well as in the nature so trusted, Hilda thought.

Mr. Arle's letter contained kind words for Alcina, and enclosed a few lines scrawled to her by her father. "A cruel gift," Hilda said to herself, but she dared not withhold it. Over that bit of paper the dying man's

hand had passed and re-passed ; his penitential tears had fallen upon it ; and, he said, his burning lips had been pressed to it, because his little daughter's eyes would look on it !

It was cruel to quicken a dormant and vain affection in one whose love would always be passion ! It is true the father bid the child forget him, love only her mother's friends and her mother's land ; yet his tender words were calculated to make her wish to remember him eternally.

It was long before any further news came from Mr. Arle.

During this summer, Ernest and Alcina became great friends ; the little dark face appeared over and over again in the boy's pictures—that was a proof of great regard.

Ernest missed Mr. Arle sorely ; he haunted the Poplars in the long days and mystical twilights, till it became peopled by his fancies ; and he was most at home there, among his own creations.

Hendon Meynard was to have visited Seadon Cottage this summer ; but his few, short letters made no mention of any such intention. Hilda found her peace in turning her thoughts from herself, and entering into the interests of others. Her father was often very weak and languid, but every fine evening the two sauntered out together—and this time, saddened by many anxieties as it was, was yet blessed to Hilda ; afterwards looked back upon with tender memory, void of regretful pain. The father and daughter drew nearer each other than ever before. Formerly there had been an exuberance of strength and life about Hilda, that, wanting any special object, had

given her a vehemence and restlessness distasteful to Mr. Stanton ; he prized in a woman

“ Softness of spirit and a sober nature,
That moves like summer-winds, cools and blows sweetness.”

And Hilda sometimes had reminded him of a rougher autumn breeze. He remembered his wife as always calm, with a sweet serenity that soothed all passion with which it came in contact. He forgot to allow for the discipline of life which tones down the strongest natures to the most equable and healthful calm, and sometimes wounded Hilda by the sternness of his rebuke, or by his keen sarcasm of her mighty way of doing little things ; but she had passed through that stage now, and a thorough companionship was established.

Ernest brought back several letters, one early autumn day, from Liston. Mr. Arle's gave no prospect of a speedy return. The fierce heat of a southern summer had quickened the languid blood in the dying man's veins : he had risen and walked, leaning on Mr. Arle's arm ; but still lived a life precarious from day to day.

“ What can the woman write about now ? ” Mr. Stanton said, as he took up his second letter.

Hilda's face had been pale, and her eyes full of tears,— something in the simplicity, faintly touched with tenderness with which Mr. Arle spoke of Castello, had moved her, it flushed as she looked up.

“ You will not readily guess what Mrs. Meynard writes about, Hilda ”—seeing her frightened look, he added, quickly—“ she wants us to have Anna here, to make a long stay.”

“ I am very glad—but why ? ” Hilda asked, . . .

“ You may well ask why—a difficult thing to make out from one of Mrs. Meynard’s diplomatic epistles. Anna has been ill, it seems ! ”

“ Poor child ! ”

“ Her mother writes of her troubles and anxieties ; perhaps Anna has presumed to have a will of her own on some important point ; but this other note I was going to open, is for you, I see, and from Anna herself—isn’t it ? ”

“ Yes. Papa, is there no other news in Mrs. Meynard’s letters ? ”

“ You can read. Let me know if Anna says anything that may throw light upon her mother’s reasons for sending her to us.” Mr. Stanton went into his room, and Hilda took her letters to read in the garden.

A very tremulous hand had traced the words in Anna’s letter, and the way it began startled Hilda.

“ You must pity me, dearest Hilda ! I am so miserable and weary of everything—do believe that I have tried to be good, to make them love me—but it was no use, I am tired of trying. I should grow very wicked, if he were not so good. Mamma has written to Mr. Stanton ; she has spoken of Bernard, perhaps, and she is so bitterly unjust ; so I must tell you about it, Hilda.

“ This family—the Boyntons—your papa knows. I have seen a great deal of them ; have stayed there ; mamma let me, because she liked my making a friend of a lady who was staying with them.

“ Oh, dear Hilda ! I am heart-sick. But I want to tell you about Bernard. He loves me ! *Ought* they not to let us be happy ? He is so good. He has done for me

often just what you used—set all things right in my mind by his clear, steadfast goodness. He loves me—he told me so, told mamma so ; and she was angry—is cruel. My head aches—I can't think. Hilda ! Hilda ! you must and shall help me. It is that Mr. Larne—I hate him ! I will die before I will marry anyone but—— yet, I am so weak, all alone ; I am afraid of myself, for sometimes I am so utterly weary, that nothing seems worth struggling and troubling about : I could do anything for peace.

“ You must have me with you—you must talk to me, and the sea-wind must blow upon me ; then, when I am well and strong, I can come back and do battle till I die ! But I do not want to die—I am so young, and he loves me.

“ Hilda ! the most terrible thing is, we are not Christians here ; we are worshippers of false things—the world and Mammon ! Sometimes I could doubt if there is a great good God—why does He not crush wrong and wickedness with his Almighty hand ?

“ Let me come, let me come ! ”

So broke off this blistered and blotted letter.

Hilda went to the study window, gave it to her father, and stood leaning on the sill while he read it.

“ She shall come,” they both decided.

“ And why should she not marry this young man, papa ? ” Hilda asked ; “ he is good and noble, or Anna wouldn’t love him.”

“ Haven’t you learnt, daughter, that goodness and Nature’s nobility are worth little in the eyes of a Mrs. Meynard ? ”

“ But you and I, papa, we will do what we can to make just this one love-story end happily ? ”

“What we *may*, child, that is, perhaps, nothing ! How would it sound that I received this young girl into my charge to encourage her in a passion, disapproved by her mother, for a young man, without, as I suppose, wealth, or brilliant prospects ?”

“Papa !”

“Hilda !”

“You wouldn’t care how it would sound, if you were conscious that you did right—secured the happiness of two true hearts.”

“That sounds well, daughter ; but I do not know. Life-long I’ve struggled with the world, losing in the struggle always, everything but myself, perhaps, I’m tired out. See me now depending almost for daily bread upon the exercise of powers, threatened day by day with suspension, at the least ! I have a daughter and a young son, if I die now I leave them *how* exposed ; I dare not think !”

“Papa ! papa ! I do not know you when you speak so.”

“You are young ; you have suffered—as yet not to weariness—you do not know what it is to go through life, feeling impassable barriers rising against you everywhere ; to dash out your hands in vain effort, only to bring them back bruised and bleeding. You do not know what it is to send your cherished thought-children, your purest inspirations, into the world, and to have them flee back to you, the image of the divine defaced from them by the touch of profane fingers, and to feel you must bear this uncomplainingly, for the sake of gold. Yet you may come to know this. God shield you from such a fate !

I cannot. Shall I not, then, counsel this young, passionate girl to submit herself to the powers that be?"

Hilda smiled now.

"You will do so," she said, "if you believe that to walk through this world clothed in its purple and—"

"What is it you would have me do, Hilda?" Her father interrupted.

"Nothing, Papa, but what your heart bids you—what your judgment approves."

"You trust me then?"

"Perfectly."

"That is well." He smiled as if he indeed felt it so.

Hilda turned from the window and paced up and down the garden.

The afternoon was drawing towards evening—"Calm without a sound." The pale sunshine lay mildly and serenely on everything.

Hilda's vague sense of passionate impatience, of impotent desire, tamed down to a kindred quiet before the great stillness of Nature.

Throwing herself down on the favourite seat under the cedar, she murmured from fragmentary recollection—

"All our life is mixed with death.

* * * * *

Though in passion we would dash, with a blind and heavy crash,
Up against the thick bossed shield of God's judgment in the field,—
Though our heart and brain be rash —————"

* * * * *

Then our will is all unwilling, then our pulses are all stilled.

* * * * *

And I smiled to think God's greatness flowed around our incom-
pleteness,
Round our restlessness, His rest."



CHAPTER XVI.

MR. MEYNARD sat alone in his room late one night, a heap of letters lying on the table before him.

He had now been reading over all the letters he had received from Hilda during the last twelvemonth—he marked their brevity, their coldness, cherished any feeling of resentment that brevity and coldness occasioned him, and did not consider what his to her had been.

Mr. Meynard's conclusions were often slaves to his wishes, was this the case now when he believed he could plainly see that Hilda no longer loved him? Folly! childish folly he muttered with the curl of "world's scorn" on his lip, as he thought of the boy and girl engagement, principally his father's doing, he told himself; and of his vehement rejection of the liberty offered him, not much more than one year since.

Mr. Meynard, the man of the world, was wiser now. It was a year and some few months since he had seen Hilda, his memory was not faithful, or his imagination

vivid ; he could easily forget : during this long absence from her, he had seldom heard her mentioned ; then sneeringly and slightly ; it would not be enough for him to have a wife good and beautiful, admirable to his own eyes ; he would need that the world's judgment should confirm his ; he could never feel firm and sure in his liking for even a new book, picture, or opera, unless his opinion were sanctioned by that of others.

Mr. Meynard could not love an ideal, or even idealize what he loved ; had he gone to Seadonfell this last summer, he would have loved Hilda afresh ; as it was he was fast forgetting what it was he had loved in her.

He recalled the brilliant Eleanour Larne, from whom he had parted but that evening ; recalled too, her gracious smile, her flattering, frank wish to see him to-morrow. How unlikely it was that a girl brought up as Hilda had been should have the style, the address of this lady, who was an heiress too.

Mr. Meynard petulantly pushed those letters from him, rose from the table with a darkly troubled face ; it was clear to him that he could only fulfil his ambitious aspirations by setting his feet upon his dying love, crushing the last breath out of it—"she will not care,"—he said.

Mr. Meynard went to dine at his mother's next day ; he knew Miss Larne and her brother would be there—Miss Larne was paying a long visit to Mrs. Meynard. He found Mr. and Mrs. Bellingdon, his married sister, and her husband there also. "How was Anna ?" he asked. She had been suffering from an attack of cold and fever, Mrs. Meynard called it.

In answer to his enquiry, she said she was much better,

but change of air was considered important—"she left us this morning to go into the country."

"Where did you say you had sent Miss Anna?" Mr. Larne asked, turning from Miss Meynard towards her mother.

"To some friends in the country. Amelia pray come here; I have dropped a stitch in my work, and cannot see where—my sight isn't what it used to be!"

Amelia crossed the room, bent her slight figure gracefully over her mother's work, then knelt; but did not say that, with all this assiduous attention, she failed to discover any traces of a dropped stitch. Mrs. Bellingdon had addressed Mr. Larne; the subject of conversation was changed, and Mrs. Meynard's work progressed briskly.

Hendon, lounging in a low chair, was languidly listening to Mr. Bellingdon's talk; but that worthy gentleman's economical way of making one brief sentence last out, by ringing changes on its adjectives, was slightly wearisome. Under its influence Mr. Meynard fell deeper and deeper into a moody reverie, till a bitter jest of Mr. Larne's—bitter because it happened to glance at a truth—and a quick look of not unkind enquiry from Eleanour's handsome eyes, roused him to the desirability of exerting himself.

Dinner was announced, and he gave his arm to Miss Larne, and had no further opportunity or inclination for meditation. This lady was handsome, clever, and no longer very young—a worldly woman, perhaps, but of a different stamp from Mrs. Meynard. The phrase oftenest used in describing Eleanour Larne was fascinating—this

fascination was a natural gift, though no doubt heightened by cultivation, by the thorough self-confidence, which gave the charm of unconsciousness to her manners. It was with her manners somewhat as with her dress—people told her anything became her; but she well knew how carefully, in accordance with innate good taste, that anything had been selected.

Some people called her “*so natural!*”—some, “*so artificial!*” She was a puzzle to those who looked beneath the surface; they wondered how far it would be safe, in any need, to throw themselves upon her kindly friendliness, asking service from it.

She would often say, in her frank way, that she had tried hard to grow cold, callous, and stony-hearted, without success; yet, whether much deep feeling lay beneath her pleasant, sparkling courtesy, it was difficult to discover.

Miss Larne—an heiress now—had been a dependant, and had felt the bitterness of “world’s use;” in her “foolish days,” she had loved with power and passion; and, of course, an iron hand had dashed the cup of romance from her lips. Now she was rich and free of will—but the man she had loved had died years ago in a foreign land. Hendon Meynard, in his best mood, recalled him to her memory; and the gifted and worldly Miss Larne showed no little favour to this young man.

Mrs. Meynard had some time since told Mr. Larne, what she had reason for believing true, that her son had quite given up the connection with Miss Stanton at last, and had requested him to avoid all mention of her, which he had done. He considered that his sister was old enough to take care of herself—had no objection to her

marrying young Meynard, if she pleased ; though, knowing his sister's temper, not quite lamb-like, he did not envy the young man.

After dinner, Hendon asked for music. Miss Larne sang well ; sometimes with feeling enough to make people call her singing odd. She did not know that she would sing to-night ; but she went to the piano and began turning over music carelessly, with her very white, much-jewelled fingers, talking gaily the while.

“Sing this !” Hendon said, at last, laying his hand on hers to stay the quick turning over of the pages.

“Why, this ?” she asked, looking up at him.

“I should like to hear it.”

“I should *not* like to sing it.”

“Why ?” he questioned in his turn.

“If I said, ‘because I do not choose,’ that should be reason enough ; I am not used to do what I do not choose : I am particularly unused to heeding any request sounding more like a command !”

“Forgive me !” he answered, bending down, keeping his hand upon hers—“forgive me ! and pray sing this.”

Her frank eyes fell before some fancied likeness in his look and manner ; they continued to be veiled a moment ; her heart beat ; his touch thrilled her ; for a few seconds she lived in a strange dream of the past : then she freed her one hand with the other, and said, softly—

“You shall have your way.”

There had been a reason why she did not wish to sing that song. When she did, she dashed desperately into the wild spirit of it ; not using the printed words, but

some that had been pencilled in, long ago, perhaps, for they were nigh effaced.

Hendon was interested and jealous ; when Miss Larne —the song ended—kept her eyes bent down and her fingers softly playing with the keys, he leant over her to whisper some words of thanks, and to ask pardon if he had been obstinate and given her pain. The handsome eyes were raised to his then, he saw that the lashes were wet.

“It’s an old, old thing,” Eleanour, said, gently ; “I haven’t sung it for years ; a dead friend wrote the words I sang.” A sigh ; then feeling that her brother and Miss Meynard looked towards her, she dashed off into a madly merry strain.

Mrs. Meynard, sitting by the fire, alternately sipping her coffee and turning over the pages of a new book, noted everything, and felt quietly content. What with Mr. Larne’s fancy for Anna, Anna’s love for Bernard, Amelia’s jealousy, her uncertainty about Hendon, she had had trouble ! now all seemed going on smoothly.

Presently she laid away her book and took her work, because Mr. Bellingdon had finished *The Times* and must be entertained, so she listened to his reiterations of opinion, that things looked bad—very bad—very bad indeed—and Adelaide took up the book her mother had laid down, asking languidly—

“What have you here, mamma ?”

“A novel ; I’m getting a shocking novel reader,” Mrs. Meynard answered, briskly.

“Oh ! how can you endure this sort of thing ! I am so sick of books of which one sees the end before getting

through the first page ; the very sight of these eternal marble covers, wearies me."

" That's rather clever, I think," Mrs. Meynard said, her sharp tone contrasting strangely with her daughter's drawl ; " at all events," she added, " it's quite new."

" And so must be good," sneered Mr. Larne ; " isn't it strange, Miss Meynard, that, though men have a rage for old wines (had for old pictures, but that's going out), and women for old china and old lace ; old books should be little regarded ? "

" It is strange, very strange," Mr. Bellingdon began ; but his wife said, coldly—

" I do not see that it is strange. There is little useful information, and no subject-matter for conversation, to be obtained from old books—no amusement either, I should imagine."

" Very truē, very true indeed, but——"

" It puzzled me to decide if a man or a woman wrote that book," Mrs. Meynard said ; " it would be amusing to have an opinion from each person present."

" Your brother-in-law's will be valuable, Miss Meynard," Mr. Larne whispered ; he coloured, looking up to meet a full, fixed look from Mrs. Bellingdon's cold eyes ; he went on, hastily—

" I am quick at these things ; I fancy I can speedily form a correct decision ; allow me to see the book."

Adelaide kept it in her hand. " This description is clever, the satire stinging. Hendon, just read it !" she said.

" My dear, Hendon is occupied : let me see it," her husband put in.

She paid no heed. Amelia rose, and came and stooped over her sister's shoulder to read the passage in question.

"Allow me to see it," Mr. Larne said again, but without stirring from the comfortable sofa where he lounged, lazily admiring the elegance of Amelia's figure. He seemed as if he expected that the book would be brought to him. In his manner to ladies he affected an easy indifference sometimes. Now, Amelia had quite a sufficient sense of her own dignity; she raised her head, looked at Mr. Larne with saucy amusement, pointed to the book and turned from the table. Mr. Larne approached it, took up the volume, and tried to draw Adelaide into conversation—not an easy thing to do while she kept glancing uneasily towards the place where her husband sat with his mouth a little open, apparently about to fall asleep. Mrs. Meynard understood these glances and returned to her duty of keeping poor Mr. Bellingdon amused; then Adelaide turned her eyes and her attention slowly upon Mr. Larne, who was saying—

"No wonder the sight of these endless novels disgusts you, Mrs. Bellingdon; it is quite enough to give half a glance through this kind of thing."

"What books do you recommend as worth reading, Mr. Larne? I don't meet with many that don't weary me intensely!"

"Oh, the works of old world-wide philosophers — cunning fellows were some of them, and their quaintness is infinitely amusing. Their writings want brain in the reader, and I think would please both you and your sister. There is so much cant in most modern books, that they are mostly intolerable!"

“What do you mean by cant?”

“Exaggeration in tone and sentiment—morbid stuff about worldliness and unworldliness. Detestable! the world's a good-enough place, and the people in it are good enough for me.”

“No wonder that Mr. Larne was a popular preacher—that a fashionable audience thronged to hear him!”

“Your irony is too cruel, Mrs. Bellingdon,” Mr. Larne said, bending his handsome head before her in mock humility—some real annoyance; “Is it not our duty to conform to circumstances—to fill our position and be content in it? Haven't you found that the only way to get through life?”

“You were going to enlighten us as to the sex of the writer of that book, Mr. Larne,” Mrs. Bellingdon said, her white face flushing slightly at the significant tone.

“I've given it the needful half glance while I spoke; it's written by a woman, and a young one. I detest this fashion of female authorship; it's one of the most hateful features of the age.” He spoke somewhat violently, and, glancing up, saw his sister standing opposite him, leaning her hands on the table, and looking at him with fixed attention.

“Be moderate, Raynton,” she said, “or I shall feel called upon to become the champion of the ink-stained members of my sex, too—Heaven knows I have no partiality for them—Perhaps, ladies and gentlemen, I could a tale unfold, accounting for my brother's animosity.”

“Unfold what tale you please, Eleanour,” Mr. Larne said, hotly, adding—“By and bye we shall have a novel

of fashionable life from the gifted pen of Miss Larne, perchance."

"I have no taste for anything so laborious as writing a book, or I should have tried my hand long ago; no doubt it would have had 'immense success,' for I have been behind the scenes, and should know how to make it *piquante*."

"But don't you think, Eleanour," Amelia asked, "that there is something very undignified and unwomanly in a lady's turning authoress? and poorer women, who might plead necessity, are seldom sufficiently well educated."

"In that last opinion I think you are much mistaken—I fancy that women a grade lower than ourselves in the social scale are often better, less showily and more solidly educated—women in the middle grade of the middle class. But that middle class is so comprehensive a one! Exactly where do we belong, I wonder? Among our not very distant ancestors we may reckon a man engaged in that shocking, low thing—trade! so, I suppose, we cannot assert a claim to belong to the aristocracy! Alas!"

"And education has not so very much to do with the matter; nature deals out talent and genius in a haphazard way—education only teaches how they should be used."

"You are quite right, Mr. Meynard; nature is a terribly wrong-headed democrat, and makes the prince the idiot and clown, and the peasant the nobleman, sometimes; but such serious conversation is fatiguing—Amelia! do sing—I haven't heard the grand piece you were getting up before I left town."

Miss Meynard complied, when Mr. Larne urgently seconded his sister's request.

It was very late before Hendon left his mother's house; the next evening, the next and the next, found him there. Eleanour Larne had completely fascinated him. Hilda was only remembered with annoyance and impatience. He had not written to her for months, and did not hear. That he was forgotten he quite persuaded himself, at last; but, feeling it desirable to break off one engagement before he formally contracted another, one night, on returning from the square, he determined to write to Seadonfell. When it came to this, he did not find it so easy to deceive himself; to be convinced of the profound truth and wisdom of what he wrote to Hilda and her father, offering Hilda the freedom he had "long seen that she desired!"

The letter written—a clear consciousness of its mean falsehood—a bitter self-contempt came over him—he half determined that it should not go, but left it on his table, stamped and sealed, and it was posted. He only sighed and weakly wished he could be sure that Hilda would thank him!





CHAPTER XVII.

ANNA had come to Seadonfell, looking but the ghost of her old self. Now, after a few weeks, she was wonderfully improved ; everything delighted her, she and Ernest and Alcina were children together, Alcy, the most staid and trusty of the trio. At first, Anna had crept about the garden when the sun shone, now she rambled over the country, the better pleased the more roughly the autumn wind blew.

Her one dread at present, was of being recalled to London ; when, one morning, a letter from Mrs. Meynard was put into her hand, she looked apprehensively at it, some time, before she opened it.

After reading the first few lines she jumped up with a cry of delight, threw herself down before the pale Hilda, the gravity of whose face had deepened into positive sadness the last day or two. Mrs. Meynard wished to know if Anna thought her friends would keep her till the spring, as she thought of taking Amelia, whose health was not good, to pass the winter abroad. Of course Mrs. Meynard

did not know how strange a time it was for such a request ; how much cause the family from whom she asked this favour had for feeling resentfully towards hers. Hendon was ignorant of where his sister was—other matters occupied him—he was suffering from a remorseful sense of traitorous weakness ; had been touched by the forbearance from well-deserved upbraiding on Mr. Stanton's part, who had written to him sternly, yet more in sorrow than anger. Now, that he felt how absolutely too late it was to retrace his way, he regretted the step he had taken ; but it was too late ; all was over between him and Hilda for ever ; her father had made him feel that.

Poor Hilda kissed the sparkling face uplifted to hers, said she was glad ; but turned quickly away and left the room, not able to sympathize with any joy, just yet.

Anna finished her letter, then fell into a wondrously thoughtful mood, rousing suddenly, exclaimed—

“ I see now ! I understand it all ! ”

“ All what ? ” Mr Stanton asked, looking up from his paper.

“ Nothing ! only why mamma lets me stay,” was answered with a sedate brow, and a burning blush.

“ I can understand that, too ! ” Mr. Stanton said, drily ; he pointed out to Anna an announcement in the paper Mrs. Meynard had sent, of the departure for Florence of Mr. and Miss Larne ; seeing that his manner had given pain, he added, gaily—

“ You coolly take for granted, Anna, that we are willing to keep you, but, young ladies are kittle cattle, and—under all the circumstances—‘ perhaps, it would be wise of me to decline this responsibility.’ ”

Anna answered the smile she detected flickering about Mr. Stanton's mouth, with one of right royal pride and confidence; then she went to seek Hilda. Hilda was in her own room, the door shut. Anna lingered outside, perplexed, irresolute; then stole softly away, was grave and full of thought a while. But Hilda looked calm and cheerful when they met. That afternoon out in the wild wind with Ernest and Alcina, Anna's wild gaiety amazed the little lady, whose own wild passions, poor child, had been of grief, more than of mirth. Mrs. Danall's heart, too, was set "all in a flutter," and many slumbering echoes round the Poplars awakened, by the clear-ringing laugh, sounding out ever and anon.

Through the bright, blowing afternoon Hilda sat by the window in her room, watching how the old scathed trees paled, the wind smiting them — watching, yet heeding very little; she thought mournfully over old times, grieved bitterly over Hendon's weakness, over his infinite falling short from any standard of true manliness. She grew paler and chillier; for her the autumn evening darkened down drearily; her heart ached, her soul was sorely perplexed and troubled; yet she could pray for Hendon, for the woman who might be his wife. She had, to the last, done battle for him nobly—tried to make her father judge him as charitably as might be, to her he owed the forbearing tone of Mr. Stanton's letter.

Leaving Alcina at the Poplars, Ernest and his companion lingered out; they climbed the hill behind the house, braved the furious blowing of the wind, to see the sun fall into the troubled sea—then, at last, they turned homeward.

It was dusk when they reached the Cottage ; even then Ernest was not satisfied—it was gloriously rough, he would down upon the rocks ; while Anna, gate in hand, pondered if she would not go there too, he was off. As she stood still, in that sheltered nook, looking after him, a sudden soberness succeeded the wild mood ; she sauntered up the garden thoughtfully, entered the house and the sitting-room in a subdued manner. She saw no one in the room, which was only lighted by flickering fire-light.

Anna went up to the fire, stood gazing into it, dangling her bonnet in her hand, her wind-disordered hair hanging about a grave face. After musing a little, she gave a great sigh—of longing about to be satisfied ? Her sigh was echoed—some one stood by her—strong hands clasped hers, the poor bonnet falling to the ground—pleasant brown eyes pryed into her face.

After a cry of startled joy, Anna said—

“ Bernard, is this right ? What brings you here ? ”

“ Need you ask, Anna ? ”

“ But, is it right ? Does mamma know ? ”

“ She could not ; it was a sudden thought, I found myself so near ! ”

“ So near ! I thought you were in London ! ”

“ No ! I have been travelling for some weeks—sketching.”

“ Are they all well at your home ? ”

“ Much as usual. And you ? Your face as I saw it last, has haunted me ; you looked so ill, so anxious, Anna ! I have reproached myself ! ”

“ I am as rosy as a milk-maid now and so merry that my childishness will frighten you ? ”

“So gay?”

“Why should I not be?” Anna said, with a somewhat reckless tone—“I am happy and safe here, and, Bernard, I have grown philosophical—enjoy the present—that is the key to my new philosophy.”

“The key opens a large and well-stored garner-house then, I trust.”

“I do not know! I use it for a charm, don’t open the door with it, least the emptiness and darkness within should frighten me.”

He smiled and took her hand, clasping it firmly.

“Have you seen anyone?” Anna asked, suddenly remembering that this meeting might not be only a pleasure; that Mr. Stanton, even Hilda, might be angry with Bernard.

“I have seen Miss Stanton, I think.”

“Hilda?”

“‘Hilda,’ I suppose, a pale and stately young lady, who didn’t look very glad to see me: I felt somewhat of a culprit before her, didn’t give a very satisfactory account of myself.”

“Where is she?”

“She left the room just before you came in,—went to look for her father, I think.”

“I must go and find her and explain.”

Anna freed herself and went up to Hilda’s room; she entered timidly—by the dim light she could see that Hilda smiled kindly—still she dreaded what she might say.

“You have seen your friend?”

“Yes.”

“ And what does Papa say to him, dear ? ”

“ Bernard has not seen Mr. Stanton—I found him alone.”

“ I thought Papa had come in—there he is now, I will just run down and speak to him.”

“ Of course, Hilda, I did not know, I did not expect—” Anna began when Hilda returned—a light in her hand.

“ I am sure you did not, dear.” Hilda kissed her and sighed ; she was not in a hopeful mood.

“ It is cold here,” she added, “ let us make haste down, Papa and Mr. Boynton are in the study ; so we shall not interrupt them : sit down and let me put up your hair, you are trembling, dear child.”

Anna obeyed, and the rebellious black hair proved tractable enough under Hilda’s skilful fingers. It did not want much arrangement ; its natural wavy flow only needed to be humoured, and then the young head looked eminently graceful. Hilda’s brown and very soft hair, which always looked neat, required more art in its management to make it set off her face to the best advantage.

“ You would make your fortune as a lady’s-maid, Hilda,” Anna said, as she looked in the glass.

“ May I accompany you to London in that capacity ? ”

“ No ! I don’t often care to look well there—here I am very vain.”

The parlour was empty and dark when Hilda and Anna went down. Hilda, on hospitable thoughts intent, ordered light and tea, saying that Anna’s friend should not, at least, be turned out of doors hungry.

Anna took up and spoiled some of Hilda’s neat work,

grew hot and cold, and when, at length, Mr. Stanton and Mr. Boynton came in together, she dared not look up for a long while; when she did lift her head and her eyes, she met from Mr. Stanton a look of kind, grave sympathy that made her long to cry. She saw, too, that Bernard did not one whit resemble a scolded school-boy; that there was no shade of annoyance or guilty consciousness on his honest face—a face plain in feature, but irradiated by the shining through it of goodness and genius.

Hilda was relieved by her father's manner; the stateliness vanished from her own; she followed the prompting of her kind heart, and treated Mr. Boynton with frank cordiality.

After tea, Ernest ensconced himself in a corner, where he thought both he and his employment would be safe from the visitor's notice; but Bernard had a genuine love of children; and of Ernest he had heard Anna speak so often that he felt an interest in him.

He went to the table where Ernest sat, and had turned over a number of scraps tumbled out of a folio before the boy noticed his proximity.

“Who drew this?” Bernard asked, holding up one of Ernest's most successful attempts at illustration.

“I did!” Ernest said, shortly, starting at the question.

“And this?”

“These are all mine,” the boy answered, to put a stop to further interrogation, being displeased at this uncemonious examination of his treasures.

Mr. Boynton, not easily repulsed, continued—

“Who taught you to draw—your sister?”

“A little.”

"Come, my boy, be frank ; I am an artist, so—"

"Are you an artist ?"

"I hope so ; do I not look like one ?"

"No."

"Well, I do so style myself. Has any besides your sister taught you drawing ?"

"Mr. Arle has helped me since we lived here."

"Who is Mr. Arle—an artist ?"

"No, only a gentleman."

"Well done, my boy !" Mr. Boynton said, laughing—
"well said !"

"What ?"

"Your '*only* a gentleman !' You hold an artist as something more than a gentleman ; some people hold us as somewhat less."

"Your son seems to have talent for drawing ; do you mean him to follow our poor and proud profession ?" Bernard asked of Mr. Stanton.

"I have not thought about the matter. Ernest is a child to us still."

"He has more than a child's thoughts and fancies. Next summer I hope to be in this neighbourhood again ; I shall come and see what progress he has made, if I may. I wonder whether Miss Stanton would willingly trust him with me, on a sketching tour, then ; I might be useful to him, and I can be very careful when fragile things are entrusted to me," and his glance rested on Anna a moment. Going back to Ernest, he resumed an examination of his drawings, saying—

"You know, my boy, that an artist can't begin his art-education too early—to copy nature is an injunction as

old as the hills, and, by some, as little regarded ; but it should be *the* word of command to be diligently and unflinchingly obeyed. You can't go wrong while you act in accordance with its spirit, in obedience to its letter."

Mr. Boynton took his leave soon, bidding Ernest come to his inn at Liston to breakfast next morning, and he would show him all he had been doing the last month, and asking permission, which was willingly granted, to present himself at the Cottage next day, previous to his departure for London.

When he was gone, Mr. Stanton spoke so warmly in his praise, that Anna's face glowed with delight ; then, Mr. Stanton, laying his hand kindly on her head, beginning with the dreadful word but, read her a little lecture on patience, obedience, endurance. After this Anna remained grave and quiet ; Ernest and Mr. Stanton both bade her good-night, and went away ; Hilda sat at work, not caring to disturb her thoughtfulness ; waiting till she should move or speak, pursuing her own mournful thoughts.

"Hilda ! I should like to ask you one thing," Anna said, at last ; "will you answer me truly ?"

"Truly, or not at all, dear."

"You have seen Bernard now, and you like him—but you cannot know how good and noble he is—will you try to believe him very, very good and — great ?"

"Yes, what then ?" asked Hilda, with a tender smile.

"Then you know me : I have a great many faults—am hardly good at all—what makes you love me ? I want to know what there is in me that is worth loving ? I feel that my face pleases him—that I am handsome, sometimes—but when he has drawn me again and again,

knows my features by heart—how could I make him love me always?"

" You want to know if I think you worthy of him?"

" Not exactly; but if I could make a home happy for him—if God lets me try—if I could be to him what my dear, dear aunt is to her husband—in time I mean."

Hilda did not answer immediately: the smile in her eyes was drowned in sudden tears.

" Hilda!—you do not speak!—you do not think I could!"

" I do heartily believe you could, you would, dear girl; but I was thinking, Anna, how hardly any win such happiness—how many, many things may come between you and it. I do not want to sadden you, but it is safer to be patient than sanguine; to keep from troubling about the future, leaving it willingly in God's hand, which must over-rule all, changing evil to good, fancied good to evil. But it is right of you to have these thoughts and fears; God grant that one day I may see you the good, happy wife you could make!"

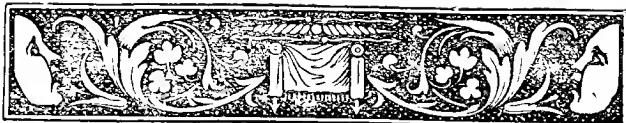
Hilda's voice trembled; Anna was quiet again for a while, then glanced up into her friend's face.

" And now, Hilda," she said, timidly, kissing the hand she had taken, " I want to know ——"

Hilda shrank back, answered hastily—

" Nothing more to-night, dear, it is very late."





CHAPTER XVIII.

“**H**AT a splendid studio this would make you, Ernest!” Mr. Boynton said, noticing, as they stood in a dark panelled room at the Poplars, how the clear north light, streaming in from the upper-half of the windows, fell on the group collected on the opposite side—on Hilda pale and grave;—the seriousness of her face had so deepened the last few weeks, that she seemed to have past the first fresh bloom of her youth and beauty; on Alcina, who kept close to her, fixing her large eyes on the stranger with an expression half-shy, half-defiant; on Anna’s half-averted head, with its wealth of luxuriant tresses; on Ernest, whose face retained its look of rare intelligence, though its delicate childishness was fast disappearing; then a ray slantingly fell on Mr. Stanton’s fine head, and on the bright-coloured gown, worn by Mrs. Danall, to whom he was talking.

Mr. Boynton lingered at his post of observation, till the living figures had vanished, and he was alone with his own fancies; he did not much care for their company

then, and he followed the rest to see the grand stair-case, the gallery, and great drawing-room.

Mrs. Danall stopped Hilda, as she was about to follow Alcy, whom she had seen glide along the terrace ; neither of those two caring to visit that room then.

Had any news come from “the master ?” she asked, as an introductory sentence merely, for she knew that she and Alcy would have heard it, had there been any.

“Not any,” Hilda answered.

“It’s not so far from Christmas, and the poor gentleman went away in May !—no news of his home-coming yet !”

“We shall, most likely, get a letter this afternoon ; Alcy must go back with us, and then we shall have the earliest news.”

“You can’t think how she wearies to hear, Miss Stanton, she is a quiet child and doesn’t say much.”

“Poor Alcy.”

“Poor master, too, I say—kept so long among papists, in those foreign parts.”

“I don’t suppose Mr. Arle is very unhappy in Spain ; he has so few ties in England.”

“He hates Spain ! as well he may ; seeing that she, who should have been his wife, my poor young lady, dear lamb ! was as good as murdered there ! And he kept there to nurse the man that did him such deadly wrong.”

“Murdered !” Hilda said with a thrill of horror.

“Murdered is an ugly word, isn’t it ? I said as good as murdered—he didn’t kill her down-right. He worried her life away with his fierce foreign ways, and his jealous fits and she had left all for him, the poor, foolish dear !

But, God forgive me ! he may be dead now ; it's ill to speak against a dead man, and, no doubt, he'll have torment enough where he goes ! ”

“ You say Mr. Arle received deadly injury from him—has Mr. Arle freely forgiven him, do you think ? ”

“ Fully and freely—the noble gentleman.”

“ Do you think, Mrs. Danall, that God's love and patience are less than man's—woe to us if it were so ! I do not know all the story ; but Alcina's father must have bitterly repented his crime before now, coming to know the generous greatness of the man he has wronged—if he has repented do you think God has wanted will, or power, to forgive him ? ”

“ Ah, Miss Stanton, you rightly say that you do not know all—Yet you may be right—for all he was a papist he may have been forgiven ; for, after his wild fashion, he loved my poor young lady ; it was finding she pined, that he could not make her happy, that drove him so mad at last—Mayhap another one who hated the master and untiringly strove to wound him, will have the heaviest blame to bear—I've had in my mind many a time to tell you —”

Just then the others came down ; Hilda went to seek Alcina, and they all returned to the Cottage ; Bernard and Anna lingering, and often looking back at the old place.

Mr. Boynton was obliged to leave them in the afternoon ; that Anna might see him off, Hilda proposed that they should all walk to Liston, except Mr. Stanton, who had been quite tired by the morning's excursion. Alcina

would so know if there were any letter sooner than if they waited at home for Ernest's return.

"You will tell Mrs. Meynard of my visit, Anna?" Bernard asked, as, for this once, he drew her hand through his arm.

"Yes," was returned with a great sigh; at parting, a sense of dread and doubt weighed upon them both.

"When do they talk of returning?"

"Not till the spring."

"Four or five months, then, before I shall have even the chance of seeing you again!"

"It was almost more pain than pleasure to meet as we did."

"Not to me, save when you looked so ill, or so—"

"Wicked," Anna suggested.

"Not quite—but angry and gloomy."

"And all those wrong, weary feelings may come back when I am at home again."

"No Anna, they will not. We must be patient, and wait the right time; you are very young, dearest. The more pain and trouble we have now, the more hope I shall entertain that all will end well, because I think all lives *have their measure* of trial justly meted out."

"And here we are!" Anna sighed, as they entered Liston.

"And I can only keep this dear hand a moment or two longer; then —"

There was quite a little bustle of leave-taking. Alcina hurried Hilda on to the post office—her goal, which she had not reached yet—leaving Anna and Ernest behind.

There was a foreign letter for Mr. Stanton; and now

Alcy's care was to get home, that this sealed mystery might be opened.

"What is this Mr. Arle, of whom I am continually hearing, like?" Anna asked, rousing herself as they drew near home—perhaps from secret saying over of some dear last words.

"Don't you know?" Ernest exclaimed.

"What is Mr. Arle like, Alcina?" Hilda said.

The little girl shook her head; the question itself revealed a depth and breadth of ignorance which she despaired of being able to enlighten. So Anna turned again to Hilda, who, feeling a little as Alcina did, hesitated, then said—

"Those kind of questions are so difficult to answer. You know he is an old friend of papa's."

"An *old* friend!" Anna repeated, in a disappointed tone.

"Not an old man, though," Ernest said. "I hope you may see him before you leave."

"And he is Alcina's guardian. Is he stern and cruel, Alcina? Are you afraid of him?"

"He is very good and kind, and I love him. You don't know him, and I don't want you to talk about him," Alcina said, hastily; but, warned by a look from Hilda, she added, quietly, "I am afraid of him when I do wrong."

Three of the party, at least, thought a good deal about the writer of the letter which Alcina clasped so tightly on that homeward walk. It was growing dark, and they walked fast, though not fast enough to please Alcy. But, at length, she found herself by Mr. Stanton's side—could eagerly watch him open and read that letter.

Noting how those dark, shining eyes devoured his face, Mr. Stanton stooped to take up the child, and sit her on his knee: they two were alone, and he went on reading.

Presently Mr. Stanton said, very gently,

“ You are an orphan, dear child—your father is dead; but Mr. Arle, your more than father, is coming home soon.”

The child’s eyes were steadfastly fastened on Mr. Stanton’s—a thrill went through her, paling her cheeks; yet she looked as if she did not understand, and he repeated what he had said. She gave a little gasping sigh, pulled her hands from his, and slipped down from off his knee—she would go to Hilda, she said. There was a note for her within Mr. Arle’s letter; Mr. Stanton gave it into her hands, opened the door for her, and watched her climb up the stairs. Hilda’s door was open, and Alcina went in.

Hilda had thrown herself on the sofa for a moment’s rest: she was very weary. Alcina glided noiselessly across the room, and stood at her side before she heard her. When Hilda looked up and saw how the child’s eyes were glistening, and her slight frame quivering, she guessed what might be the cause of her excitement: she took her up and clasped her close and tight in her arms.

“ Read this to me !” Alcina said.

No easy task to Hilda; yet, a wholesome one. She was not to lose an iota of faith in the *possible* glory of manhood. There was something infinitely touching in the simplicity of the few sentences Mr. Arle had written to the little orphan; and Hilda’s eyes grew dim, and her voice failed her. Alcina listened intently; then, would

have it read once more. She repeated softly to herself that word of impenetrable mystery, *dead!* She got the precious note from her father ; made Hilda read that, too. Before it was finished, she began to sob and cry, somewhat to Hilda's relief, whose heart ached at her strange unchild-like self-restraint. Then, after a little, she would be consoled—the source of consolation being the fact that Mr. Arle would soon come home.

This *soon* went further and further off.

There was so much to arrange for the young heiress ; he had so much trouble from the cunning of her relations and the indolence of all business people, that his patience was sorely tried, he wrote. After all, it was out of his power to make any final arrangements now. When Alcina was old enough to judge for herself, he hoped she might choose to give up all her Spanish possessions to her relations : she was rich enough in good English land and gold, and he wanted to see her free from the burden of this over-much wealth—from the obligations it would entail.

“It’s weary waiting, weary waiting !” Mrs. Danall said, when a second postponement of “the master’s” return was announced to her. “I know how he must long for a breath of the air of this place and a sight of *her* child.”

“Is Alcina like her mother ?” a question that had been on Hilda’s tongue many times before, she asked now.

“Bless you, no ! more’s the pity ! haven’t I told you how the poor child cried once, because her eyes and hair were so dark ? she was no higher than that then, and had been asking me about her mother. Miss Flora’s eyes were blue, and her hair goldly brown, both looking full of

sunshine ; it was the most beautiful hair I ever put brush to, but a fine plague to me. The mistress, Miss Alcy's grandmother, was a very strict-like lady, and I had many a scolding about not keeping my young lady's hair neat (not even the mistress could often scold Miss Flora). But it was an impossible thing to do ; she was just a little fairy, and never could keep still ; oftener than not, when I had dressed her for dinner, fixed up her hair trim and nice, out she'd rush to gather roses, and come in all torn by the bushes, and her hair blown about her face by the wind ; then the bell would ring, and she'd put it up in some strange, careless fashion, and go down. Ah ! she was a wild little lady : but she is still enough now ; God give her rest in her stillness ! ” Mrs. Danall wiped the tears from her eyes, and was turning away, but she had seemed in a communicative mood to-day, and Hilda asked—

“ Was Mr. Arle as grave a man when he was young ?—how came he to love this gay little lady ? ”

“ How could he help it ?—no one could ! I would try to be angry when she gave me trouble ; but one smile, or word, would turn my heart to her again ; but Mr. Arle **being** so grave a gentleman—not handsome either, to those who didn't love him—I was a long time before I suspected that my young lady thought of him.”

“ Do you think she did love him ? ”

“ That she did ! nor could she help that, either ; as you'd say if you could guess what kind of a lover the master made ; minding me of an old song about ‘ tender and true.’ Well I remember the first time I took any thought about her heeding him ; she was reading near

the window of her room, and I, doing her hair, could see over her head. ‘There’s your father and Mr. Arle, walking up and down the terrace, talking very earnest-like, Miss Flora !’ I said. My young lady looked up quick, and, turning then, Mr. Arle looked up, as I daresay he had done many a time before I noted him ; Miss Flora coloured crimson, I saw her face sideways in the glass, and pulled her chair back from the window ; she was hard to please that day, and when ready, wouldn’t go down till the last minute. Eh ! but, Miss Stanton, it makes me heart-sick to talk of these things, for all it was long ago ; to think how blithe a place this dreary old house should be now.”

And Mrs. Danall went away and Hilda soon heard her voice raised, scolding Nance for some trifling neglect.

Except when her curiosity was revived by Mrs. Danall’s partial revelations Hilda had left off wondering about this old story. As the winter went on she had one subject for very anxious thought.

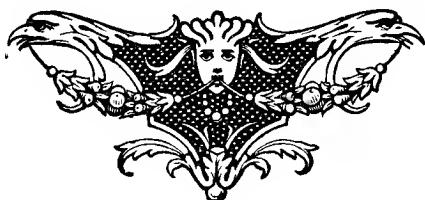
It was a severe winter at Seadonfell and Mr. Stanton had a sharper attack of a similar illness to that of previous years which left him very weak—Dr. Winley, in whom Hilda had fortunately found a kind friend, looked grave about the case and hinted at the probability of its being necessary that Mr. Stanton should pass another winter in a warmer climate.

Mr. Stanton could not write for months : during the anxious time of his illness Hilda’s best-loved work—her book—was neglected—she could not settle to that : but she wrote much, a great deal more than Mr. Stanton, or Anna, who watched her jealously, imagined, she earned

money and the satisfaction of being able to assure her father that they were in no need, that there was no necessity for his working.

All the household longed for Mr. Arle during that time of anxiety, it would have been such a rest to have him come in now and then, Ernest said.

When the mild weather set in Mr. Stanton gained strength faster than Dr. Winley had expected; becoming conscious of renewed power nothing could prevent him from using it. The pressure of the numbing fingers of disease upon his brain had stopped its operations, just as he was putting the finishing strokes to a long cherished work, and Dr. Winley owned that moderate employment would do him less harm than the irritation of its being forbidden. Yet Hilda was unhappy whenever she saw him with a pen in his hand.





CHAPTER XIX.

“**E** really is coming home, at last ; he will not disappoint us this time,” Mr. Stanton said, passing Hilda a letter he had just read. “Somebody must go to the Poplars, and tell Alcina the glad tidings. What news have you, Anna ?—you do not look the brighter for the perusal of your despatch.”

“They are come home, or will be home in a few days. Mamma will write again from London, to tell me exactly when I must return ;—it will be soon !” and Anna sighed.

“Hilda ! what do you think of our escorting Anna to London, and so being there to meet Arle ?”

“That would be delightful !” Anna said, brightening from her sombre mood ; but Hilda looked grave.

“Are you serious, papa ?” she asked.

“Even so, my prudent daughter ; I think I *must* go, and it would be pleasant to me to have you and Ernest with me.” Anna had turned away ; he added—“Nothing should happen to pain my child ; you need not fear.”

“It would cost a great deal, papa,” Hilda’s prudence suggested, after a pause of deliberation.

“Yet I think we might manage it. I am likely to make advantageous arrangements for the publication of my book, I hear.”

“Do you not think the fatigue and excitement will be too much for you, papa?”

“No! I think I shall get Dr. Winley to pronounce that the change will be beneficial. Let me see—this is the beginning of April—I will give you a fortnight to make your preparations, Hilda—ample time, surely! I will write to-night or to-morrow, and tell Boynton of this scheme.”

“And Alcina?”

“Alcina! humph! as we go to meet Arle, we cannot leave the poor child behind.”

“I am glad you think we may take her.”

“Now I remember it, Hilda, you must go to Carnkon to-morrow, and provide yourself with new ‘things’—the feminine way of designating clothes, isn’t it?—Anna will give you the benefit of her cultivated London taste.”

“It is such a journey to Carnkon, papa!”

“You can get there and back in the day: you could not expect to see anything in Liston that the fashionable Miss Meynard could approve.”

“You are laughing at me, Mr. Stanton.”

“No, child; I have noticed the once or twice you and I have walked through Liston that all creatures feminine, not too sophisticated to satisfy their curiosity, turned to survey you, while Hilda, in a greyish dress, shawl and bonnet, slips by unremarked; so I have arrived at the

conclusion, that if it is ‘place that lessens or makes more a man,’ it is dress that does the same for a woman.”

Mr. Stanton went away, and Hilda thought over this proposed journey with little pleasure and much apprehension.

The prospect of it made Ernest very quiet—seemed to require a good deal of thinking about ; it would be sad to lose days and weeks of spring’s first beauty ; but then he would see Bernard Boynton, and Bernard’s pictures and many other pictures besides ! What that thought was to him no one could exactly tell. Halting perplexed, half-way between pain and pleasure, he appeared to be indifferent. It was in this way—from his feeling so much the two aspects of a question, being slow to choose between them, that he came to be often considered dull and apathetic by those who did not understand him.

A few days after the arrival of Anna’s letter, Mr. Stanton received a note from Mrs. Meynard ; she had heard that the Stantons meant to bring Anna to London, and expressed her pleasure at the prospect of seeing them again. Mr. Stanton smiled cynically, reading her civil phrases, catching through them a glimpse of some perplexity as to how she could be polite enough without inconvenience. She regretted that their visit should be made at a time when the approaching marriage of her son and daughter would so occupy her time and attention. That ceremony was to take place only two days after Anna’s arrival in town.

This quietly-communicated intelligence of important events about to happen in her family, did not much surprise Anna, though she had no positive information of

the engagement of her brother or sister ; still, she had been prepared for such a result, from the months spent by them on the continent in the society of Mr. and Miss Larne, under Mrs. Meynard's supervision. Her expectations had been frankly communicated to Hilda.

The wedding would, perhaps, not take place in London, Mrs. Meynard said ; if it did not she would make arrangements for Anna's joining her in time, and hoped to return to town herself immediately afterwards, long before Mr. Stanton would think of leaving it.

The very last evening of her stay at Seadonfell, came all too soon for Anna ; on it she went out alone and took her way down to the shore. Hilda was busy, and would not miss her, and Ernest was away on some long ramble.

It had been a very lovely sunny day, the evening was dull ; when Anna had descended the rugged path, and found herself in the little rock-strewn nook of beach, she was tired and warm ; she strolled on slowly ; the tide was at its lowest : she rounded the point at the western extremity of the beach, and came into another tiny bay ; then sat down on a bit of rock, close to a pool of green, crystal-clear water, which the receding tide had left as a little lake.

The sun had not yet set, it broke from beneath a mass of cloud ; its level beams fell on her mildly, brought out the brilliant tint of one cheek, tangled themselves in the eyelash and drooping hair. The sun would so soon be quenched, that, though it dazzled her, Anna did not try to screen her face, or turn it away. Sitting, looking down into that clear depth of water, her mind's eyes looked deeper and deeper into a less clear depth of thought ; her face grew grave and troubled.

The sun set, and Anna's eyes were lifted up, and her face caught somewhat of the ruby glow of the sky ; its expression became resolute and more hopeful ; she heeded nothing external, as she mused on and on with dreamy look and folded hands.

The tide began to flow into that pool ; its waters swelled and gurgled ; the wind rose a little and sounded mournfully among caves in the rocks ; brought in the sound, too, of the breakers on the bar far-off ; these sounds seemed only to lull the girl deeper into her sea of thought. She sat stonily quiet now ; her eyes looking straight on, far away, fixedly ; not at the darkening sea, or the clouding sky. Yet these influenced her ; her thinking now became ever more serious and more sad ; she had more to fear than to hope from the future, she fancied ; she might never be so happy again as she had been these last few months. Her aspiration must be to be enabled to do right ; caring, as little as might be, if the fruit of that right-doing should be happiness or misery.

The wind grew louder in its wailings, the water complained dismally.

The very seriousness of Anna's mood made her chill ; it was a pale face now that looked out so steadily over the whitening sea. She began to ponder over, shudderingly, the dreariness and weariness of her possible future ; she recoiled as she pictured how it might only be varied by strife and pain ; by the clashing of two strong wills not to cease till one, the weaker, should be broken. An intense longing for peace, for the rest of knowing a mother's love, came over her—what if she should yield at the outset ? So try to secure this coveted treasure.

There were waves in the pool now; the foam flew up the rocks on the point, driven in from the far-off breakers, the moaning wildened to shrieking—Anna did not heed save that her thoughts seemed to darken and wilden with the sea and the sky:—she imagined herself sold, the wife of some rich, or great man, whom she did not love; in the thickest midst of heartless hollow mirth and splendour she fancied herself suddenly smitten by a reproachful glance from a pale sad face—Bernard's—would it then be possible for her, the wife of another, to avoid falling at his feet, praying his forgiveness, reckless of the gibes and sneers of thousands? If she should be repulsed, left by him, by all, alone, not even daring to look up to God!

Starting in horror from the picture she had drawn, Anna first took note of the great sounding of the wind and sea, of the far-off white mist creeping stealthily on: but the stormy aspect pleased her, she had no thought of danger.

Why might she not lie down on that rock as on a bed; close her eyes and fold her hands and let the water creep up closer, ever closer, till it should lift her up gently, float her out into the great, boundless, fathomless deep. She pictured herself, pale and calm, the black water beneath, the night sky above; carried away and away; fancied how the moon might break through the clouds and look down pityingly, benignly, upon her still, dead face.

Dead! that is a dread word! It would be a dread thing to die so, wilfully! No! Life must be the sea beneath her; God's providence, the over-arching sky above her—His love the pale, pitying moonlight.

Just then a great wave broke upon the point with a loud booming—part of it rolled through the now black pool, swelled it high; the cold water washed over Anna's feet! How icy chill, how deadly dark it was! She stood up hastily and turned to go.

The mist had come on, and fallen down upon her, and gathered round her; she was but a few steps from the point, yet she must get round it quickly, if ever, alive; through the mist she could see how the white waves were leaping up upon it. She was bewildered, the noise of the water seemed threatening and deafening now she consciously listened to it; while she paused to think, the rock she stood on was again washed over.

The mist and the spray seemed to conspire to blind her. She made a hasty step from the place where she stood, and plunged up to her waist in water. She had stepped down between two fragments of rock; it was easy to get out before a wave swept in; but, if this quieter water were already so deep, how should she round the point, from which ever and anon came that deep booming sound? The attempt must be made—it was her only chance, to climb the wall of rock by that dusky dimness was impossible.

Calling up all her courage, Anna plunged on through shallow water; once she was carried off her feet by the force of a wave, and thought, with ghastly dismay, that she was indeed to die to-night—to be washed out by the cold, cruel tide; but she rose again and clung to the rock, clutching one point after another. Another wave came rushing on, its noise seeming to her that of the advancing of certain death; but she kept a desperate hold of the

rock, and waited. The shock dashed her face against the jagged stone ; one cheek was cut, and the flow of blood helped to blind her, but she went on desperately. The next wave did not reach so high, or come upon her with such power ; so she knew she had passed the point—was, if her strength held out a few moments more, saved. The blood flowed freely from her temple—she grew faint.

A few efforts yet, then she was lying half senseless high up upon the beach ; not believing herself safe while still so near the roaring waste of water, yet powerless to drag on further. She did not know how long she lay, if she fainted, or remained half-conscious ; the warm blood was gushing over one cheek, otherwise she was cold as death.

Presently, she roused again, felt better ; impelled by fear, she crawled on and reached a bit of turf, beyond high-water mark. Sitting down there, she bound up her wound, after a fashion ; her hands were cut and bleeding, too ; and she looked despairingly up at the rugged steep to be climbed before she could reach the Cottage.

Then she saw the gleaming of lights and heard her name called ; she answered feebly. In a few moments, Mr. Stanton, Hilda, Ernest, and two or three fishermen, surrounded her.

Ernest had come home very late from his long ramble, and had inquired for Anna. Hilda thought the two had been together, and grew alarmed when they looked out into the misty, wild evening, heard the sounding of the sea, and thought how likely it was that Anna had gone down to the beach alone.

A fisherman had predicted a stormy night, and Ernest had noted the rapid progress of the mist and swift

sweeping-in of the spring-tide. He grew frantic when Anna was nowhere to be found, and rushed out to obtain assistance. The fishermen shook their heads. The young lady was lost, if she were still the wrong side of the point. Dread and horror fell upon them all.

Anna was asked no questions, but speedily taken home. She felt thoroughly ashamed of her carelessness, and longed to receive the scolding she thought she deserved. No one seemed inclined to give it her ; all she could do was to submit unhesitatingly to whatever Hilda desired. Very soon she lay at rest on a warm bed. Even Hilda could not avoid smiling, though she was full of apprehension for the consequence of this adventure, when Anna said laughingly, looking up at the kind face above her, and kissing the hand that had been binding up her wounds, "Shall I not make an admirable appearance at the wedding, with one cheek plastered over, and the other, I suppose, pretty well scratched ?"

"I shall not much care, dear, if these scratches are the worst effects of the exposure," Hilda answered, gravely ; "One cheek is quite free from blemish and this wound on the other may be almost covered by the hair ; it will be long before your hands will lose their scars ; but, Anna, I do not think you will be at the wedding ; I think we shall have to keep you here some days to rest, and be nursed."

But Anna protested vehemently against the journey being put off : so vehemently, that Hilda thought all the more that it would be needful that it should be ; she knew that, as it was, Mr. Stanton expected to be only just in time to meet Mr. Arle, that a postponement

would be a great disappointment to him, and a heart-breaking one to Alcina. She passed a feverish night, haunted by terrible dreams of drowning-cries and death struggles ; but, in the morning she was up and dressed early, before Hilda came in, and declared that she was well and merry, and would go to London by herself, if no one else would go.

She was too merry on that journey ; her eyes grew brighter, and her colour deepened and deepened, though it was a chill, dull day ; Hilda watched her anxiously, and longed to be at their destination ; she could not enjoy Anna's flow of spirits, and ceaseless sparkling talk ; would far rather have seen her quiet and sad. She could see that her father shared her fear, and stole apprehensive glances at the crimsoned cheeks and brilliant eyes ; but Anna would not be silent, and indignantly denied feeling ill, or needing rest. The only thing to be done was to get to London as soon as possible.





CHAPTER XX.

MR. BOYNTON and his son and daughter met the travellers on their arrival in London. Miss Boynton was several years older than her brother, plain and homely; with something in her calm, sensible face that straightway won Hilda's heart:—she and Esther at once established a quiet friendship.

The Boyntons lived at Hampstead and Mr. Stanton did not mean to go to their house on his first arrival, so they all went to an hotel to breakfast, having arrived in the early morning.

When the gentlemen went out and Anna and Hilda were left to rest—Anna throwing herself on the sofa, confessed she felt ill, that her head ached badly. She had not slept since she left Seadonfell and could not get rid of a dull booming sound in her head; like the waves *that* night, she said, with a shudder.

Esther Boynton was somewhat of a doctress—she had heard of Anna's adventure and recognized the symptoms

of approaching fever, in the throbbing pulse, burning brow, and restless glittering eyes.

"I do not think we ought to run any risk; the children should not come back into this room," Esther said when, after an hour or two, Anna's movements and suppressed moans told of increasing pain.

They all listened, but Anna was the first to recognize a bounding step on the stair. Hilda had been bathing her forehead, she sat up and pushed the wet handkerchief away saying, "I shall frighten him."

The sudden movement brought on severer pain and she crushed her face down on the pillow.

Esther prevented anyone's entering and sent her brother for a medical man. He pronounced that the patient was sickening with malignant fever; ought to be taken to her home at once. There was perplexity on perplexity. Mr. Stanton had been to Mrs. Meynard's to find a note left for him requesting that Anna might immediately follow her into Cornwall, she having left a confidential servant in town to escort her.

A long journey was not to be thought of, the best thing to be done, apparently, was to comply with the Boyntons' urgent entreaty that Anna might be taken to their house.

Miss Boynton went home immediately to prepare for the invalid's reception. A few hours later Hilda found herself installed as sick-nurse, in a wing of the Boyntons' large and comfortable house. Mrs. Boynton being so great an invalid that it was impossible for Esther to undertake to attend to Anna, Hilda could not be denied

the privilege of nursing her friend. Mr. Stanton, assisted by Bernard, had to take charge of the children.

Anna grew rapidly worse ; the fever raged higher and higher. On the evening of the third day, Dr. Moer summoned another physician, only to have his own opinion confirmed. The girl's life was in imminent danger—that night would be decisive.

Hilda's eyes dilated with pain, as, looking from one grave face to another, she saw how little hope either entertained ; she thought of Bernard and of the mother, whose natural grief would, she felt sure, be embittered by remorse. Mrs. Meynard had, of course, heard of her daughter's illness, but had chosen to believe it trifling—an excuse for delay in leaving her friends ; and the "double marriage in high life" was consummated while Anna struggled for life with the fever-fiend.

"Young Boynton is working *himself* into a fever," Dr. Moer said. "Are they engaged?"

"Not exactly."

"A variety of the old story? Might not the young man be sent to summon the young lady's mother? She has one, I think?"

"Yes." Hilda caught at the thought—it might be the means of reconciliation ; then her heart sickened, remembering how the reconciliation might come too late, she said—

"Mrs. Meynard is in Cornwall—it is so far."

"No use, then, Boynton would not go. Before he could return all may be over."

Dr. Moer did not leave his patient that night. How

slowly it wore away for the watchers within and without the sick-chamber !

The first light of dawn showed Anna very quiet—dead, or sleeping ? All the fever-flush had faded from her face—it was still and white, and cold as marble.

Hilda bent over her—could not tell whether or no a faint breath touched her own fear-chilled cheek.

Dr. Moer sat by her, with his steady, grave face, his finger on her wrist. The nurse, whose office Hilda's anxiety had made somewhat of a sinecure, stood at the foot of the bed, never taking her watchful eyes off the rigid face.

It seemed that ages of that hushed, awed expectation swept slowly on.

The light in the room, waxed dirty and dim ; the dawn came on and on ; birds woke and sang ; no curtains could keep the bright morning out : its light fell fuller and fuller on the sleep that looked like death ; and the watchers watched on and on.

Hilda bent lower yet ; the beating of her own heart sounded frightfully loud ; she heard nothing else ; yet, did her eyes, over-strained with anxiety, deceive her ? pale lips moved feebly—the dark eyelashes stirred—a soft, conscious look met hers.

Just then Doctor Moer moved his fingers from the wrist, looked across to Hilda, said very quietly—“ Thank God ! ”

A thrill went through Hilda ; a wild longing to weep seized her ; but she controlled herself till a restorative had been given, till Anna slept again and Doctor Moer was gone, then she sank down and cried softly.

The May morning came on, and the balmy wind waved the light curtains of a window Dr. Moer had thrown up; Hilda's tears stayed, and her eyes full of infinite love and sweetness, fixed themselves on the sleeper's face, and she prayed.

Not many of us pray more than a few times in our lives! do not start and frown, strict formularists, who, at the appointed season, never fail to go through your *form of prayer* (mocking words).

How often do you—do any of us—lift our thoughts so high that we consciously feel them in God's presence? How often are our thoughts pure enough to wing their way so far above sin and sense?

We *trust* God hears us, as we think devout thoughts on our knees; or, at night, laying our heads down wearily, send up an aspiration towards One in whom is no darkness at all; but we do not feel our spirits in contact with His glory. Yet this we *may* do, hardly; but we *may* rise from our praying, feeling that for awhile we have been out of the flesh; have sent, not our thoughts only, "winged messengers," to the Lord's throne, but our very selves have lain at our Father's feet—have wrung hands without feeling them of flesh—have shed tears without feeling them hot on our cheeks. So Hilda prayed on that May morning; giving thanks and making supplication.

Anna regained strength slowly.

She was very weak and very low-spirited; often when Hilda thought she had been sleeping, she would find the pale cheeks wet with tears.

Dr. Moer shook his head. This constant depression

was either a bad symptom or a cause of mischief, he told Hilda when she spoke to him of it; if the latter, it must be removed, or he would not answer for the consequence.

Hilda had followed him to the hall; she re-ascended the stairs slowly and wearily; she could sadly guess the cause of Anna's grief. Mrs. Meynard had been told of her daughter's past peril; of her slow and uncertain convalescence; but she neither came nor wrote. Three days before, Hilda had told Esther that she felt certain Mrs. Meynard had not received her last letter; for Hilda retained her old belief that there was some mother's love for Anna in that proud heart. She wished Bernard would go to her. She would not have felt so sad now, had she known that, her word law, Bernard was gone.

Hilda put on a cheerful look, as she re-entered the sitting-room where Anna was.

Anna lay on a sofa, drawn near an open window; she was carefully wrapped up, and it was the middle of a most lovely and June-like May. Her sad wistful eyes turned to the door when Hilda opened it, only to be averted in sick disappointment.

Hilda came and sat by her.

"Is it not beautiful weather? Dr. Moer wants very much to get you out, Anna, as soon as you are a little stronger; and I am sure it would do you good," Hilda said.

"It would not! Nothing, will, but —"

Anna covered her face, and broke into a passion of weak crying. It was long before Hilda could soothe her; then she said—

"Mamma! Hilda! she cannot know *how* I want her!"

It is cruel, cruel ! I wish I had died ! My own mother does not care if I live or not."

"Is this all that troubles you, dear ? Be calm and tell me, for your mother will come ; we have written, but she cannot have had the letter ; she shall be fetched. Anna, I am *sure* your mother loves you."

"I do not feel to care for anything but to be folded in her arms—I am a child again—that would satisfy me."

"And you shall be, darling, and soon."

"That is what I long for ! I do not seem to love any one else. Every longing but this died when I was so ill."

"But take heed, Anna ; old loves will strengthen when your old strength returns, dear child, and—"

"Hilda ! I hear a carriage now. Look out ! it must be mamma." The pale face crimsoned, and she tried to rise.

"Lie still, and I will go. I cannot see from this window. But, Anna, if you excite yourself so, you must not see any one."

"I will be quiet, only go, please ! "

Hilda went, was downstairs just in time to meet Mrs. Meynard and Bernard. That lady clutched her hands, said, quickly—

"I have been ill ; I did not get your letters—did not know how ill she was, or that she cared to see me. She is not worse ? "

"Oh, no ; but she has so longed for you, that she does not get strong ; she will get better at once now you are come."

Mrs. Meynard looked older and much worn ; Hilda

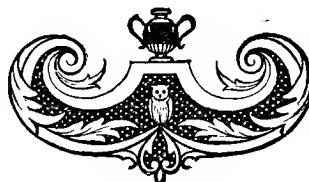
arew a trembling hand upon her arm ; it rested there heavily.

“ She is altered, her hair has been all cut off ; but do not be frightened,” Hilda said, as they went upstairs—adding, “ Wait here a moment while I tell her ; she is still very weak.”

The proud lady, the mother, waited submissively without till she was bidden to come in. Hilda only waited to see Anna in her mother’s arms, and stole quietly away.

She went down to say a few words to Bernard, who, his mission fulfilled, thought it best to return to town, for the present. As she accompanied him to the garden-gate, a longing to go out on to the breezy-looking heath came over her.

It was near sunset, and there was the foretaste of evening’s freshness in the air : she soon put on bonnet and shawl and started off,





CHAPTER XXI.

HILDA knew that her father and the children were in town that day—Bernard had told her so—still she took a path leading away from the direction of their lodging, and towards the least frequented part of the Heath.

Hilda's brief smile from the window had been wholly for her father. Now she felt the free, open air delicious, and as something in it sent her thoughts travelling to Seadonfell, the Cottage, the Poplars, and “the master,” she recalled the look Mr. Arle had lifted to her, when, on the day of her greatest anxiety, he had stood beside her father. The current of her thoughts was checked; she had set out too independently and too vigorously on this, her first walk, for so long, and sudden faintness made her glad to find a seat beneath a blossoming thorn, and to lean her head back against the tree. She soon felt better, but sat still: the very beauty and sweetness of everything, joined to her feeling of physical weakness, induced a mood of dreamy sadness.

She sat facing the west; the brilliant light made large tears swell in her eyes, weak with watching in a dim room, and she closed them.

Something came between her and the glowing sky; a shadow fell and rested on her face. She opened her eyes, rose; pleasure and surprise flashed up brilliantly through her delicate pallor. Mr. Arle took both her hands, held them, stood looking at her, as if he, too, were pleased that they met once more.

But she released her hands, drew back, and said, hastily—

“Do not stay and talk to me now.”

“You are not plague-stricken! there is no danger out in this pure air. I will undergo quarantine before I return to your friends, if you like; but I *will* have this pleasure.” He spoke smilingly, but looked at her with an expression in his eyes, before which hers drooped. She had only to yield and sat down; Mr. Arle sat by her.

“As you will stay, tell me all about them,” she said; and Mr. Arle had to answer many questions concerning her father’s health and spirits, Ernest’s occupation of his time, and Alcy’s proceedings. Hilda, in her turn, had to reply to some questions; then Mr. Arle rose, saying—

“You are looking very pale; you will take cold, if you sit here longer. Let us walk about a little. This is a nice place; I suppose you have often been here for a breath of air?”

“This is the first time and,” Hilda added, rising, “I do not think I can do more than get home.”

“Take my arm then,” the strange eyes shone down upon her kindly. “There! make it of some use, it is

strong enough and willing enough to serve you—You need not be afraid to touch me, the others won't be home for a couple of hours and I can spend them in walking on the heath."

Hilda took the offered arm. Mr. Arle accommodated his pace to the weakness very evident in her face and every movement. How long was it since his strides had been shortened for any woman leaning on his arm. Did he remember ?

His thoughts were apparently in the present not the past ; a look of enquiring kindness shed down on the white face beside him every now and then, perplexed the receiver of it. Was this the same Mr. Arle who had gone away—"the master" of the Poplars—Alcina's somewhat stern guardian—the rough, uncompromising friend ?

Hilda glanced up—the same face a little embrowned, its lines a little deepened—what had softened him ? but she could not study the face long, her dark eyes attracted those blue ones, whose beams fell down on her like very sunshine.

"I am very glad to be in England again," he said, "so glad that I am patient of being kept from home—if home, I may call the place that has so few home-like ties to bind me to it."

"How beautiful this lovely spring-time must be at the Poplars."

"Ernest and Alcy rave about it somewhat."

"Poor children ! I dare say they long to be back now."

"Your father and I have made a plan ; for you and him

to go to a quiet, little sea-side place not far from here for a fortnight—before our all going home together—I think it would do him good—shall you like it?”

“You do not think papa is ill?”

“Oh no! but he has been anxious about you; he is not looking as he used—strangely enough you, young lady, seem precious to him: I think it will be good for him to have you all to himself and fancy he is taking care of you—shall you like it?”

“Yes; and you, Mr. Arle, are to take charge of the little people?”

“On the contrary, they take charge of me. Alcina does to perfection; she has been making a study of all my peculiarities—how many lumps of sugar I like in my tea, how many in my coffee, and so on; indeed, I have much cause to thank you who have done so much towards making her what I find her. The year has wrought a wondrous change!”

“I am very glad if you think her improved; but I have done very little, her own will has been at work. Here we are!”

“Not too soon—for you. What messages? How they will all envy me!”

“My dear love to them all. Do not make papa anxious by saying I do not look well; of course, I am a little tired.”

They parted; he watched her up the garden, and she looked back and smiled before she disappeared in the house.

“God bless you, for a noble girl!” Mr. Arle said, and went back to the heath, to muse over the little she had

said—the much he had heard of her from father, brother, and Alcy, the last few days. Mr. Arle forgot some things strangely, while he meditated.

When Hilda went into Anna's room, Mrs. Meynard came to meet her, kissed her, pressed her hand, and tried to speak ; but broke down utterly and wept !

Anna was looking weary, but full of calm content ; she stretched her hand out to Hilda, pulled her down and kissed her many times—whispering that she had been wicked and wayward and exacting, but that dear, dear Hilda must forgive her. Then, as Dr. Moer had been, and had forbidden more talking, Anna lay back with a smile on her mouth and closed eyes, dreaming herself to sleep.

Her ill-advised walk and the agitation of this day were too much for Hilda. Mrs. Meynard quite took her place, and she had time to be ill and to take the absolute rest she was bidden.

“ Much suffering might have been spared if you could have been here sooner, madam,” Dr. Moer said, looking into Mrs. Meynard’s proud face, from which his presence drove back all sign of newly-stirred tenderness.

Though the words were spoken very low, Anna caught them ; a flush of pain passed over her face.

Very soon the invalid went out, and then Mrs. Meynard began to wonder when she might carry her off. She had a long private interview with Dr. Moer ; he took the opportunity of impressing upon her, that her daughter’s health would be uncertain, and her state precarious for months, after the shock her constitution had sustained, and that any anxiety and agitation might induce a fresh

manifestation of latent mischief. He could not tell how deeply his words pained the proud woman, who listened with so cold and unmoved a face ! No one, but, perhaps, Hilda, could tell what she suffered just now ; what grief, humiliation, and daily martyrdom of pride.

Bernard remained in town ; tried to work off his fear and longing. At last, one day, he felt he could hold out no longer ; he went home resolved to see Anna before he left the house, and to talk to Mrs. Meynard.

They—Mrs. Meynard and Anna—had left his father's house only that morning ; Bernard resolved to follow them.

The short journey to Shelworth, exhausted Anna to a degree that fully awakened Mrs. Meynard's fears and tenderness. On the second day she revived. She had taken a short turn on the smooth sands, leaning on her mother's arm ; in the evening lay resting on the sofa, and watching a beautiful sunset. Mrs. Meynard sat by her, pretending to read ; but oftener looking at Anna's pale, thin face than at her book. All at once she saw the long-absent colour rush into the girl's cheeks, to leave them of an ashen whiteness.

“What is it ?” she asked, quickly, coming closer to her.

At the moment a servant entered, to say that a gentleman wished to see Mrs. and Miss Meynard.

Anna's words, “Mamma ! it is Bernard—poor Bernard !” were not needed. Mrs. Meynard's face froze, she drew away the hand Anna clasped, would not meet her appealing look. While a stern strife went on in the mother's heart, Anna sprang up with a kindled light over all her

face, only to sink back trembling with weakness. Bernard was already in the room ; he came to her side, forgetting all but his love ; his pain at seeing her so changed ; his joy at seeing her at all.

Again Anna looked appealingly towards her mother, but the proud face was averted. Bernard clasped her poor thin hand ; they looked into each other's eyes—his were full of tears ; Anna laid her cheek down wearily and caressingly upon the hand holding hers ; when, after a moment, they both looked up—they were alone.

Mrs. Meynard went to her own room, sat down, and thought bitter thoughts as the evening closed in round her.

What had she not hoped and planned the last few days ? Anna had been so docile, so child-like, had seemed to love her so entirely, to be so satisfied by her love, that she thought the girl's whole nature changed—all the past forgotten. How hard it was that another should step in between them just now !

In Mrs. Meynard's busy, scheming life, she had hardly ever paused to think, as she thought now ; folding the gathering darkness round her empty heart. Old memories and old pains thronged back upon her. Her heart had not stiffened and straitened till she had met a great grief that, failing to turn it to God, turned it to the world : that was long ago ! yet, bitterly the fierce feelings of that time came back upon her now ! Why should they torment her to-night ?

The longer she staid up there alone, thinking how little her child cared for *her* now, the darker grew her mood.

Presently, she heard a bell ring down stairs ; then a

servant knocked at the door to say that Miss Meynard wanted her. She answered hastily that she was coming, but still delayed. Another knock at the door: she rose and opened it impatiently, and found Anna standing outside, shaking from head to foot with agitation she could but badly bear.

“Oh, mamma! I am afraid you are angry—vexed—I have been so longing for you to come down.”

Mrs. Meynard did not answer. She half-led, half-carried her daughter down; put her on the sofa; then stiffened into cold erectness, finding Bernard still there.

She bustled about; stirred the fire, rang for light and for tea, which, she remembered, Anna ought to have had long since. Bernard was repulsed when he offered to do anything for Anna, even to pass her cup. Mrs. Meynard would do all herself, and her hasty, jerking movements told plainly of inward irritation. But gradually the grimness of her mood gave way. Anna looked so wan, and her eyes, full of tears, sought her mother’s face so beseechingly. Bernard was so quiet—his whole manner softened to a reverential gentleness—that Mrs. Meynard found herself becoming weak and yielding. Had all been ventured, then, perhaps, all had been won!

But Anna had entreated Bernard to be patient, not to trouble her mother yet—to trust to her own constancy and her mother’s generosity. Bernard returned to town that night only half-satisfied, yet feeling that it would have been an unholy deed to run the risk of stirring up strife where reigned a sweet calm, and that Anna looked too fragile to weather even a short sharp storm, so he would wait with what grace he might.

This waiting is the armour of the strong, as well as the weapon of the weak ; there's nothing like it in this world. Rebel ! fret against it—scorn it, young soul ! bruise and weary yourself in endeavour to do without it ; at last, be compelled to take it upon you.

Anna learnt many things as she looked on Life, still half-resting on the bosom of Death ; but, as she looked, Life and Love came nigher and nigher, twined their arms about her, and drew her out of Death's embrace—breathed upon her, freshening and deepening the hue of her cheeks—brightening her eyes, and quickening the flow of blood in her veins.





CHAPTER XXII.

T often happens that when relieved from some great responsibility, we sit down to rest, and think we will fold idle hands over a quiet heart; though the hands would fain be still, the heart will not, but heaves and stirs till it troubles the weary hands into unrest. So it was with Hilda after Mrs. Meynard's arrival; her spirit seemed to take advantage of the body's weakness and enforced idleness, to make its clamours heard. There is in every house a skeleton; at every feast, a death's head; in every heart, a main-spring of trouble and regret, which, touched by conscious or careless hand, sets fell machinery into confused motion.

After Anna left, Hilda was still to stay a few days at Hampstead. One morning she sat, as she had sat several mornings before, in the great chair Mr. Boynton insisted on her occupying, drawn into the bow-window of the pleasant parlour—trying to listen to the good old book the good old gentleman read to her.

Mr. Boynton thought it very pleasant to have this

intelligent young lady for a companion ; but, this morning, the reading became almost intolerable to Hilda—every distinctly enunciated word seemed to jar upon an irritable nerve, giving her acute pain. Her only resource was to cease listening ; she let her thoughts fly away, and busy themselves and weary themselves with a thousand anxieties about those dearest to her, till severe headache warned her how foolish and self-defeating a plan this was : her weary head fell upon her hand, and Mr. Boynton, glancing up, noted a look of suffering.

“I am afraid I have wearied you, my dear,” he said.

“No, it is not your reading that has tired me, sir,” Hilda answered truly ; and she turned a look of longing out upon the fair, bright day, quite unconsciously.

“I wish Bernard would chance to come down this morning,” Mr. Boynton said ; “you might have a drive, and I’m sure it would do you good. If he does not, I think I must even take reins into my old hand.”

“Your son must have heard your wish,” Hilda answered, her face brightening a little from its weariness : “here he comes.”

“I came for that very purpose,” Bernard said, when his father told him what he had just been wanting him for. “I was coming yesterday, when it turned out wet ; the day before I was from home. Will you go out at once, while it is cool, Miss Stanton ? The pony-carriage will be ready immediately.”

“Your gratitude sounds almost like a reproach,” he said, as a few moments after he was settling Hilda in the comfortable little carriage. “I am only selfish ; I want

the pleasure of talking to you about Anna ; you know I went to Shelworth ? ”

“ Yes ; and I want to hear all about your visit.”

But when they were fairly out and away the morning was so delicious—everything so fresh and fair, after yesterday’s rain, that Hilda did not feel inclined to do anything, but just lean back and give herself up to dreamy enjoyment of it ; she gazed out over the sunny landscape till her eyes ached, then luxuriated in feeling the tempered warmth fall upon the closed lids.

Bernard read her mood in her silence, closed eyes, and the slight smile on her mouth ; he respected it. As they drove through a narrow country-lane, she roused herself to beg a spray of hawthorn, still left in a shady place ; then, the charm broken, they began to talk.

Hilda thought how perfectly beautiful a plain face could look, as she watched Bernard’s kindle, as she spoke of Anna. He told her, too, much about himself, that he thought she, so true a friend of Anna’s, ought to know ; he was a reserved young man ; but this reserve once broken, the waters of his soul gushed out freely ; and pure and crystalline they were !

They had a long drive ; for Bernard sometimes looking out over the landscape, sometimes flashing a sudden glance, seeking sympathy, into his companion’s listening face, did not much heed where they went.

Hilda leaned back languidly, weary with pleasure, when, at last, they were driving rapidly homewards.

“ That must have been Mr. Arle ! ” Bernard said, suddenly. “ We have just passed a gentleman who bowed to you ! ”

"Was it? I saw no one!"—and Hilda looked back.

"Shall I turn?" Bernard asked.

"No! he is a long way off, and does'nt look round."

"I am sorry we did not stop, he will be disappointed. I want to know that Mr. Arle, he must be a noble fellow, it has happened that I have only seen him once," Bernard said.

Hilda left Hampstead two or three days after that drive: when she and Bernard parted they felt themselves friends for life.

"And when I come into his domain," Bernard said, as he went with Hilda to the station, where she was to meet her father, "I shall try and take Mr. Arle's friendship by storm."

"I warn you that your endeavour may be vain: there may not be room for you in the castle, it must be of narrow dimensions; so few are admitted."

"Rather I choose to suppose it a great mansion to be entered through a strong door at which many knock; through which few are worthy to pass:—such a tenement I always desire to enter, once within, the strong door closes on you so firmly, so surely; you are there, to be entertained royally and loyally, till the mansion itself crumbles into dust."

Hilda was silent; she thought how empty the great mansion must be, if only the ghost of past hope and love reigned there; how its desolation must echo in pain if only memory trod through it; was it then first that a quiet, conscious desire to press up to the door, to knock and have it open woke in Hilda's heart?

In a moment or two the long-separated father and

daughter met, and Hilda remembered nothing but the pleasure and pain of this meeting. A little bustle, then Bernard was gone ; Hilda and Mr. Stanton had started on their journey, they sat opposite each other, and, for a while, exchanged only looks—one by one their fellow-passengers left them ; then they began to talk. In spite of his worn look Mr. Stanton had nothing but good news to tell Hilda ; good news about the business that had brought him to town ; about Ernest's enjoyment, Alcina's usefulness, and Mr. Arle's thoughtfulness for them all—and he answered her anxious questions about his health by smiling assurances that these few days that they were to spend "alone together" at Heathdon would quite set him up.

Hilda and her father almost regretted having so soon to get out at a little country station : yet when they found they were still a mile or two from their destination, they were not sorry to find how everything was made as easy for them, as if the wand of a fairy-tale enchanter had been at work for their behoof. A little carriage was in waiting to take them, through a shady lane or two, across a corner of a common, from which they saw and felt the sea, to their farm-house lodging. Who had been the enchanter Hilda did not trouble herself to ask, knowing how the question must be answered.

As she sat in the old-fashioned parlour at sunset that evening, alone, for her father was wandering about outdoors, and she was too tired to join him that night ; resting her arm on the window-sill, leaning her cheeks on her arm, gazing out in deep enjoyment of everything ; of the sweet air coming to her from over beds of June-roses,

groups of tall lilies, plots of lowlier, and as fragrant flowers, stirring the row of limes at the bottom of the garden, till their spicy odour reached her, too, and she caught glimpses of the blue sea between them ; she thought of Mr. Arle, of Bernard's words about him, of the last time they had met ; then she smiled softly and sadly, and shook her head, rose with a slight shudder, as of some inward chill, and turned resolutely away from the window and her dreamy thoughts.

The little time spent at Heathdon, was very pleasant. Hilda and Mr. Stanton soon began to return from their evening drives, with fresh, healthy faces ; but which of the two first grew home-sick, remains unknown.

Ernest's frequent letters were full of such ardent desire to see his sister again, that they sometimes brought tears into Hilda's eyes ; he wrote rapturously about the colours, canvasses, brushes, and all requisites for painting, with which Mr. Arle had supplied him, and of the permission he had received to make a regular studio of the room at the Poplars, which Bernard had admired.

A day was fixed for the meeting in town, and starting on the long, homeward journey.

“They will say you look better, papa, and I am a regular gipsy !” Hilda observed, as they took their last breakfast in their farm-house parlour.

“ You are a little less bleached-looking, chilid. What news have you in Bernard's letter ? ” She had just received one.

“ He is rather in trouble : Mrs. Mcnard and Anna have left Shclworth, and he has heard nothing from either.”

"I distrust Mrs. Meynard, I wonder he does not."

"He is so very good, he trusts everybody."

"Thank you, daughter, for an implied compliment!"

Hilda smiled and went on, "He is quite wonderfully simple-hearted, for a man who must have seen something of life!"

"You admire him; so do I. Does he realize your ideal of manhood?"

"Oh, no! His is a beautiful character, but——" Hilda had begun hastily; now she paused.

"But what?"

"I hardly know myself what the but is. Bernard is not at all weak, yet he never seems to me so decidedly *masculine* as my ideal man would be. I like more vigour and grandeur; in fact, perhaps I should wish him a little less pronouncedly *good*—a little more evidently *strong*."

"Beware! beware! lest some day you reap——"

"I am forming no prayer," Hilda answered, quickly. "I never can express just what I mean when I am talking; but it seems to me that a man's character should reverse the order of a woman's; its manhood, force of will, and energy of execution, should be apparent to all, felt by all; while only one or two should see its other aspect, feel the charm of its tenderness and yielding gentleness. A woman should, I suppose, seem always and to all soft and gentle, yet should keep her heart true and staunch, husband a hidden strength for any great need."

"That is your theory? Well! but I fancy you have seen Bernard Boynton only in his lamb-like aspect; and that he can be a lion, too, in the world, among men."

"Perhaps; at all events, Anna thinks him perfect. No one should hope to find more than one person to think them that. But now for my packing-up—it gets late; and shall we ever see this pretty place again, papa, I wonder?"

"I wonder! Not together, child—it is not likely—and we have been very happy here. It is always somewhat sad and strange to leave a place, conscious that, in all human probability, it will know us no more.'





CHAPTER XXIII.

HERE was a joyful meeting in London. Bernard was present, but it was with difficulty that he found an opportunity for a few moments' quiet talk with Hilda, about Anna.

"We do not part for any very long time," he said. "You know I spoke of being in your neighbourhood this autumn; I still hope to get as far."

"Ernest will watch for you."

"Miss Stanton, I am sorry to hurry you, but it is time you took your seat," Mr. Arle spoke, and Hilda obeyed quickly.

There was no hastening on that journey home; Mr. Arle had it all his own way, and did not appear to be anxious to reach Seadonfell; yet, generally, he did not seem to know what fatigue was, and was inclined to push on for his destination, whatever it might be, regardless of what other people would call hardships.

This lingering over the journey made Hilda uneasy;

she wondered if Mr. Arle thought such care needful for her father, and watched him vigilantly. Was he feebler than when they came to London? She feared—"Yes."

It was on a most lovely evening that the travellers reached Liston. On their way from thence to Seadonfell they passed near Mr. Arle's house; but the "master" went on with them to the Cottage.

"Is it not a glorious spot?" Mr. Arle asked, in a voice that challenged denial, after he had turned to take a long sweeping survey of the scene—of the broken line of shore, the undulating expanse of moor, the few groups of pines, and the distant mountains—careful wardens circling in the landscape on one side, as the sea bounded it by its boundlessness on the other—everything now glowing in the rich level light of the hour before sunset.

No one was inclined to deny that the scene was glorious. Hilda least of all, whose heart danced with pleasure at this home-coming. Some of the delight she felt shone through a gathering perplexity, when she raised her eyes to Mr. Arle's, in wonder at the tone of his question.

"What! you, too, are glad to come back; you like this rough place better than Hampstead, with its hay-fields and bowery lanes?—or Heathdon, which you left so reluctantly?"

"Of course, I do, Mr. Arle; for I presume to call myself a person of good taste: and, this is home, too."

"The Poplars! Mr. Arle! Alcina!" Ernest cried, in an excited way, having been the first to catch a glimpse of the old place.

Alcina sprang forward with flashing eyes; a gloom

gathered into Mr. Arle's as he looked in the direction of Ernest's needlessly out-stretched finger.

The Cottage had put on a brilliant holiday aspect to receive them. The porch, and part of the latticed wall, were covered with the blossoms of climbing roses, clematis, and jessamine; there mingled with these, the orange-coloured flowers of a beautiful creeper, which Mr. Arle's gardener was very proud to have nursed, and brought to thrive, in so exposed a place as Seadonfell.

A note from Alcina had told Mrs. Danall when to expect the travellers, and she was at the Cottage ready to half-strangle Alcy in her fervent hug, and to welcome "the master," clamorously, after his long absence.

There was quite a noisy excitement in the parlour. Mr. Arle drew off when he thought his part was played out. He stood in the bowery porch looking towards the Poplars. Hilda could see him from the bow-window; fancied that the bright light smote across a troubled face, and sighed; rightly or wrongly guessing his thoughts, their regretful, vain sadness.

When she and Alcina were unshawled and unbonneted, and Mr. Stanton, thrown upon the sofa in the window, up to which the temptingly-furnished tea-table was drawn, looked quite at home again, Mr. Arle was still standing in the porch.

Hilda sent Ernest to tell him that tea was ready, and that they all waited for him; then Mr. Arle shook himself, as if striving to shake off unwelcome thoughts clinging heavily, and came in.

It was by no means a quiet tea-table.

Mrs. Danall, forced to sit down to it, and occupying a

chair between Ernest and Alcina, was almost deafened, and wholly perplexed, by their accounts of wondrous sights seen in London. Hilda made quiet explanations; while Mr. Stanton, merrily inclined, rather helped the younger people in mystifying the old lady.

It was not in Mr. Arle's nature to keep himself "sad, separate, apart;" but coming home did not seem to be so pleasant to him as it was to the others. The abstracted mood he struggled against had its attraction for Hilda; surely she made a legitimate use of a woman's power, in trying to draw him out of it and completely into the circle of cheerful talk. How far her influence, how far Mr. Arle's own will prevailed, it were hard to say; but soon the expressive face lost its storm look, and Mr. Arle's temper cleared up bright, breezy and genial. After tea, when Hilda was busy upstairs, much merry laughter floated up to her from the garden, where Mr. Arle, and Ernest, and Alcina were hunting for strawberries by moonlight.

Ernest and Alcina were gone to bed, thoroughly tired, and all was quiet when Hilda went down. She stepped into the garden just to take in a few breaths of the balmy night; all there was perfect stillness—the moon had climbed high in the heaven, and hardly a whisper of wind stirred anything from a breathless calm—lying under her serene light, gazing up into her tranquil face.

Hilda stood a few moments as hushed as all else; then she heard footsteps and a murmur of low speaking—

" Well, fair daughter mine ! " Mr. Stanton said, as he approached—thinking that a fair daughter indeed she looked, that silvery light falling full on the white brow ! He passed his arm round her and drew her on with him.

Mr. Arle's voice sounded harsh and discordant when he said—

“Miss Stanton is come to warn you indoors out of the dew and me away—home! Indeed, it is very late.”

Hilda had entertained no such prudent thoughts just then; she would have liked that the talk she had interrupted should be resumed, and that they should all linger a while longer out in the fair night.

She did not say so, but supposed it must be late. Mr. Arle bade them good night and went away—not home, the night was too beautiful. He struck up the hill-path winding round behind the Poplars. Reaching the highest point of that high ground, even here there was no wind to-night, he found. He stood some while looking down upon the grey pile, which showed strangely ghost-like beneath the moonlight. Could he see no wraith there?—not see a casement open, white arms flung out, waved wildly towards him? Nay! nought! The pile might be mouldering, crumbling away visibly to the eyes bent on it so long; but those eyes saw nothing with even ghostly life move about it—they were withdrawn. Mr. Arle went on, descended the hill-side to the edge of the turfed, overhanging cliff, along that—so down and round to the nook of beach where Anna had been in such sore peril a few months before.

It was all so tame to-night! the water rippled in playfully; there was hardly any dash or splash on the most exposed point of jagged rock. He watched it a little. Had he come down there with the conscious desire to keep a thoughtful vigil on this first night of return to a haunted neighbourhood, after a long absence?

Of what?—of whom did he think, standing there? He heaved one great sigh, and turned away. It was warm and quiet down there; no spray! no wind! A yawn of weariness might have followed the great sigh, as Mr. Arle went towards home.

He was not expected. He had left his baggage at Liston to be sent for in the morning. His housekeeper was ill in bed, and Mrs. Danall had not told her of the tidings she had received from Alcina.

The night, so soft and sweet without, fell chill and dank in the entrance-hall, to which Mr. Arle did not gain admittance without difficulty. There was no light, no fire, no welcome to receive him—no welcome save from his old dog—who sprang out and up on him. The man and the dog embraced cordially, as equals; the great dog's paws were laid on Mr. Arle's shoulders, and the two shaggy heads were close together; that was the heartiest welcome “the master” received; the old man who admitted him, was sleepy and cross, and muttered discontentedly to himself as he went to get a light.

Mr. Arle paced up and down his long dining-room, old Lyon stalking after him solemnly; it was a whim of Mr. Arle's to call his dog by his own name.

The old man returned, a candle in his hand, which he set down on a table; where it served to make the darkness of a large room visible. “Would Mr. Arle have supper?”

“No.”

Then a parley was held between the old man and the housekeeper, through a keyhole, about what room was fittest for Mr. Arle's reception.

Mr. Arle threw back the shutters of the window to let

in the moonlight and an iron bar fell down; making a heavy clanging noise that echoed through the house drearily.

"Would the master mind sleeping in the blue-room?" the old man came back to ask.

"No, anywhere, it is all the same!"

"Mrs. Bryan wanted to know because it was drier than the room he generally had and when gentlemen come dropping in after a year or two without—"

"Of course, of course! I complain of nothing—want nothing—indeed I can sleep on this couch for the matter of that and give no more trouble."

Against that, through the keyhole, and the old man, Mrs. Bryan protested; it was not the trouble and so on.

Left quiet again; Mr. Arle resumed his walk—folding his arms; shivering; saying to himself that it was very cold. A chill smote him on the cheek as he crossed the stream of moonlight he had let in; but the cold he felt was not from without; it was a sense of desolation, of want, that chilled the strong spirit, through it, the body.

Yet how many times before, Mr. Arle had returned alone to a lonely house after long intervals of absence, without feeling as he did to-night! He had been enough company for himself; memory cherished as the innermost, dearest self.

Never before had a dreary sense of solitude struck upon him thus icily.

Where was she, that memory, his spirit-wife?—Lost! lost! blue eyes; golden hair; rosy cheeks; snowy skin; soft caresses from little dimpled hands; kisses from a full red mouth; clear, low-ringing laugh; light, dancing,

joyous step : he could recall all these ; but, to-night, they would not blend into one dear, familiar phantom-presence—This memory was no girl-bride, no child-wife ; only a something lying deep under Spanish earth ; its resting-place marked by a fair sculptured white monument, blackly overshadowed by a dark-foliaged tree—would the former presence never again return ?

Never ! never ! that he knew ! why not, he might have known. The knowledge stood waiting before a closed door ; on the threshold of consciousness ; if he opened the door it was but to push that knowledge back and away, out into the night. Was there not room for it and Pride ? or why ?

The old man came back ; Mr. Arle's room was ready ; Mr. Arle's musing ended for that while, perhaps.

The early morning found him on his way to the Cottage. Hilda had been in the garden ; she stood in the porch, looking over the flashing sea, and dreaming, apparently ; the fresh wind had given her a colour, and she was pleasant to look upon in her pretty light dress, a spray of clematis entangled in her hair.

Mr. Arle had come across the down and approached over the turf, close beside the garden-paling ; he might have seen how a deepened shade of colour came into the musing face, raised quickly as he lifted the latch of the gate ; only from surprise, and because he and the Mr. Arle of that day at Hampstead, had been the subject of Hilda's thoughts. He stopped to pick a rose in the garden ; then came up to Hilda slowly and loiteringly ; offering her the flower carelessly, with some remark upon a peculiarity in its formation ; he apologized for so soon

again intruding himself within their family-circle; saying, that he must confess to finding an empty house insufferably dull, at first, though he did not doubt he should soon become reconciled to it.

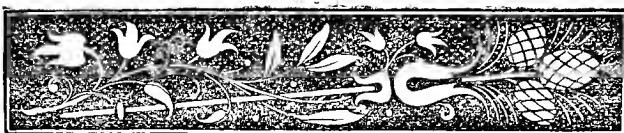
Mr. Stanton came down, and Hilda went in to see if breakfast were ready; dropping the carelessly-given rose as she did so, not stopping to pick it up. Alcina came to the table with it fastened into her dress.

For weeks, Mr. Arle was each day at the Cottage; he was constantly with Mr. Stanton, asking advice about his new schemes and undertakings, and talking over subjects in which Mr. Stanton was peculiarly interested. Hilda felt herself excluded from these councils, because Mr. Arle so often chose to consider her appearance as a signal for his departure. She was inclined to be jealous of her father's perfect satisfaction with his companionship; to wish she felt herself more necessary to him; she looked after them wistfully sometimes, as they set off on an evening's ramble together. She resumed her long-interrupted work; to live in it as much from necessity as from choice; yet it was pleasant to turn from the stubborn unsatisfactoriness of the actual life to the plastic ideal realm.

Hilda sometimes, just now, felt very angry with Mr. Arle, as well as jealous of him. He was driving her to seek some other interest, by keeping her father so much from her; yet he presumed to seem displeased at her manner of occupying herself. He was often present when she joined the rest of the family, with the influence of a long morning's steady, absorbed work upon her, visible in her pre-occupied look; then he would sometimes greet

her with a few mocking words, or what she thought such, and a disagreeable sarcastic smile. At such times the proud blood would mount to the pale cheeks; and the Hilda, who gave him back a look of something like defiance, was not more like the weak and weary girl he had met that day, both so well remembered, at Hampstead, than was he like that Mr. Arle. Poor Hilda always reproached herself afterwards for having given those haughty looks; theorizing about exalted Christian virtues, it was humiliating to be so lightly led into a practice opposed to that theory. But it was very painful to her loving nature, and very painful to her pride, to be treated so capriciously, sometimes almost contemptuously, by one for whom she could, in return, entertain nothing like contempt; whose steady, constant friendship she felt would be a boon, indeed! Just now and then fugitive harmony was established between them, only to be broken up into discord as soon as it had showed them how perfect it might be. Whether Mr. Stanton had noticed how ill his friend and his daughter agreed, and was thereat amused, or whether he saw nothing of what went on, Hilda could not tell. Yet, he did not look as if anything amused him. His daughter sometimes read more than she dared try to understand in the expression of his face, when he was quiet and thought no eyes watched him.





CHAPTER XXIV.

CN the afternoon of a sultry July day, Hilda was going down the garden with a volume of Shakespeare in her hand, bound for her favourite shady seat. She had her eyes nearly closed, the excessive brightness so dazzled her; when suddenly she and Mr. Arle met; he greeted her and was going on to the house, but she said—

“Papa is ill to-day, Mr. Arle; I left him asleep.”

“I must not go in, then?”

“No, if you please; he is so easily disturbed.”

“You have provided yourself with a sufficient companion already, I see; so I had better be off again.”

“It must be very hot on the road now. Papa will not sleep long; he wondered whether you would come to-day.”

“Does that sentence imply a gracious permission to remain with you?”

“If you choose so to take it; only do not let us stay to talk, or dispute, just here, in this burning sun.”

Hilda hastened to gain the shade, and Mr. Arle followed her.

“You are intending to spend a profitable afternoon—hunting up quotations, perhaps?” he said, in his hostile tone, glancing at her book.

“I was intending to spend a holiday afternoon, enjoying the shade and coolness of the forest of Ardennes,” Hilda replied, keeping the book, which she had been about to lay aside, in her hand as she sat down—returning a defiant look for the hostile one; but an expression of sad weariness quenched the brilliant haughtiness.

“Holiday! Do you ever tire of your work, then?” Mr. Arle asked.

“People generally do, sometimes; whatever the work may be.”

“But cannot you live in it, for it, and be content?”

“Perhaps I could, for a while, if I tried hard.”

“For a life-while?”

“Perhaps I could—perhaps I could not.”

“An answer more prudent than satisfactory.”

“Perhaps I might say that your questions are more—but I am not disposed to be quarrelsome this afternoon, Mr. Arle—the weather is too warm.” Hilda leant back and folded her hands over the book; Mr. Arle stood near and watched her; presently he said, abruptly—

“By-the-bye, have you heard how famous you are becoming? Did I tell you anything about it?”

“No,” spoken with a very uninteresting face.

“Among a certain ‘literary set,’ it was my misfortune to mix a little with, the last part of the time I was in London, I heard some tale of yours, that has appeared

lately, spoken of with unmeasured praise; and brilliant successes prophesied for your future—have you heard anything of the kind?”

“A little, from papa.”

“Does it not give you pleasure?”

“I hardly know; I do not much care,” then the weary face kindled as she thought of her father’s weak languor and she said frankly—“Yes it does give me pleasure, I am glad.” Mr. Arle, watching her, replied,—

“I thought it would; thought you would enjoy the prospect of fame, of the world’s applause; thought you were ambitious, Miss Stanton.”

“You say that word like a term of bitterest reproach—would my ambition so much displease you?”

“I do not suppose you care for an answer to your question.”

“I do not ask questions that I do not care to have answered.”

“I shall give you an evasive answer; it was more strange than pleasant to me to hear you spoken of by people who didn’t know you—I might have become ‘a lion’ had I hinted that I have the privilege of your acquaintance. I hugged that knowledge secretly: to hear your character and talents and history (‘experience’ they call it) speculated about flippantly and freely and—but, of course, these things are unavoidable—are necessary consequences of the pursuit you follow. It is quite right, natural at least, that you should care for the fate of your work, triumph in its success: this is an effect, not a cause—not the head and front of your offending.”

“I should not triumph in success for its own sake; *I*

am not ambitious, Mr. Arle ; though I do care what my friends think of me and of what I write." Hilda spoke warmly—"have you condescended to read this story you speak of?" she asked, after a pause, in a hesitating, timid manner.

"I? Hasn't your father told you how I collect everything from the 'gifted pen' of the authorcss—Miss Stanton—have her works splendidly bound, believing that they will be valuable some day?" His mocking tone brought an angry flush into Hilda's face—he noted it, a slight dilation of the flexible nostril and a restless movement of the white hands—he added, with a sudden change of his whole manner—"Indeed! to speak in sober earnest they are more valuable to me now than you imagine; but—"

He paused so long that Hilda lifted up her eyes. He went on—

"It is no use; I shouldn't make you understand; I am over-fastidious, perhaps. One part only of my thoughts in this matter I can let you see. Yours is an unhealthy occupation; I don't mean so much physically as mentally: it is too engrossing, causes you to lead a kind of separate life with which no one else can sympathize; apparently to shiver your individuality into atoms. Your friends may group about, pick up piece after piece, grow the more perplexed the larger number of fragments they possess. That is not pleasant; you lose your own identity."

Hilda smiled, as if Mr. Arle's earnestness did not quite displease her now.

Mr. Arle went on—"I had planned work of so different a kind for your father. I wanted him to act out his

changed views; instead of writing about them, to preach and teach them. It was a great disappointment to me to find how literary an atmosphere I was to breathe at the Cottage, what inky fingers, sometimes, to have offered me. Do you remember yours were literally inky, one day?"

"The very practical Mr. Arle forgot one trifling consideration, that my father had to choose an occupation he could live by," Hilda softly observed, wondering at Mr. Arle's remembrance of such a trifle.

"Aye, and, but I am afraid of appearing very impertinent, if I ask did such practical considerations weigh with his daughter? Forgive my asking!"

"Certainly."

"I am glad of that; but the danger is that such an occupation commenced from such intelligible motives, will become so much a second nature that it will be carried on when, if, all necessity ceases; that an internal necessity will be substituted for an external one; that the kind of mental excitement will be needed."

"A strange speech. You are afraid that duty will become too pleasant."

"Yet I am scarcely of the number of those who think that what is pleasant is mostly wrong; what hard and distasteful, right."

"Such doctrine is certainly a kind of denial either of God's goodness or of his overruling providence," Hilda said gravely, half to herself.

"Yet the right way is the one hard to find, hard to walk in."

“The only one where we feel anything like peace—catch a glimpse even of anything like real happiness.”

“Grave words implying a grave truth—more fit for my lips than yours, young lady.”

Hilda’s book was laid beside her now. Mr. Arle threw himself down on the grass, and silence fell after this preparation to continue the conversation.

Hilda’s eyes looked fixedly out, away seawards, watching a single white sail on the blue water; Mr. Arle’s looked at her, unconsciously marking the slow, seldom flickering of light and shadow on the dark hair and quiet face, soft muslin dress and small folded hands.

The last words had winged Hilda’s thoughts for a far journey; she was somewhat startled when Mr. Arle asked abruptly,—

“Where is Ernest?”

“At the Poplars—as usual.”

“Then Miss Alcy is there too, I daresay.”

“Yes, she went with him this morning.”

“She is getting a regular little flirt—yet to say so is perhaps to insult her simplicity—rather a flirt’s artfulness is a good imitation of a child’s artlessness. Well, wouldn’t it be a pleasant novelty for one love-story to end happily—for one stream of true love to run smoothly, untroubled by uncompromising parents or tyrannical guardians?”

The colour that swept across Hilda’s face, the quivering of her eye-lashes, an uneasy movement, reminded him of something disagreeable that he had totally forgotten—that she was not one whose maiden meditation had always been “fancy free,” whatever it might be at present. He went on quickly—

‘If, one day, when I am an old man perhaps, Alcina and Ernest should still love one another, after another fashion, I shall see no reason for playing the ogre—for preventing the little heiress from bestowing herself and her possessions upon the artist.’

“You are looking very far forward, Mr. Arle.”

“A thing I never do for myself, except beyond Time. What pleasant, truly delightful anticipations those words I used, ‘when I am an old man,’ might awaken!”

“I should not like Ernest to marry an heiress,” Hilda said, taking no notice of Mr. Arle’s last sentence. “Alcina will be very beautiful, as well as rich, and——”

“The opposition will come from an unusual quarter, then! But I think you are mistaken; Alcina will never be very beautiful, according to my ideas of beauty.”

“Never like her mother!” Hilda thought; “I think she is very charming now,” she said; “she has very fine eyes.”

“I do not admire them; I like more quiet-shining eyes—those that resemble planets more than flashing meteors, that one may call ‘sweetest’—not finest—‘eyes were ever seen.’ Sometimes Alcina’s are like a dark night, repelling one by their blackness, anon they flash brilliantly—in either phase they can make me shudder. Some things, some people, are not to be forgotten. I knew a woman once with somewhat such eyes; she hated me, for light cause; she injured me deeply, fiendishly.” He spoke with averted face.

“And you forgave her,” Hilda said, half-involuntarily.

“Who says I did?”—he turned quickly, and spoke fiercely.

Hilda's eyes steadily met his ; she answered, quietly—

“No one says so. I do not know who the woman was, but you did forgive her.”

“If you had a little more knowledge, who knows but you might have less faith?—yet, thank you, dear young lady, for your good opinion, whencesoever it may spring. Only,” he added, with the most complete change of look and tone, “don't make a hero of me—a hero of romance, and put me into a book.”

“Mr. Arle,” Hilda began, angrily.

“Miss Stanton?”

“May *I* speak plainly to *you*, for once?”

“An it please you, fair lady!”

“Do you know”—she plunged desperately into a remonstrance that she had long wished to make—“that, without making a hero of you, I should like to be able to think you above harbouring little prejudices and ungenerous thoughts? And you do show much narrow-mindedness, are not at all generous, in your way of judging me. If you cannot be friendly, you might try to be courteous and just, for my father's sake.”

Mr. Arle was busily watching an insect struggling through the forest of grass ; his head was bent so low that Hilda could not see his face at all ; her cheek was flushed, she had time to fancy she had made a free and foolish speech, almost to repent it, before he looked up and asked—

“In what have I been discourteous? Why does Miss Stanton think I am not her friend? What disservice have I done—what service omitted? Of what do I stand accused?”

“It is only pleasant to receive services from friends, Mr. Arle ; you lay us under many obligations, and take pains to make me feel that you and I cannot be friends. As you are resolved to find fault with all I do, I daresay you will blame this frank speaking ; but I am hurt by your injustice, disappointed in you, *do* care that you should think well of me, *do* desire that we should be friends.”

“I daresay I have disgusted him more than ever,” Hilda thought ; she saw him smile slightly, she fancied in scorn ; then his face looked cold and stern.

“I see I have spoken to no, or ill, effect ; well ! perhaps, I can find secret satisfaction in believing that you are not so generous, so noble, as some people think you.”

Mr. Arle had never heard quiet Hilda speak with so much warmth ; he glanced at her, and asked—

“Would that be any satisfaction ?”

He repeated the question before it was answered, then Hilda said--

“None.”

“You are kind, indeed, to trouble yourself so much about me !”

“I will endeavour to avoid doing so in future.”

Hilda rose, took up her book, and turned away perplexed, troubled, somewhat frightened ; Mr. Arle made no effort to detain her, but she had not gone far before he was at her side.

“I cannot make fine speeches,” he said, in a constrained voice ; “but I require you to believe, Miss Stanton, that, in anything, no one will serve you so freely, so fully, so faithfully as I shall do. Give me your hand !”

Hilda’s hand obeyed, touched his and would have left

it, but it was grasped firmly, till Hilda's eyes were lifted up to meet Mr. Arle's. "We *are* friends," he said, looking into them: they drooped. She answered—"As long as you please."

"As long as you need me," was the reply. Her hand was dropped.

Just then Mr. Stanton approached them.

"A formal reconciliation?" he asked. "Have you and Arle been quarelling, Hilda?"

"You witnessed the ratification of a compact for cessation of hostilities between two strong, belligerent powers," Mr. Arle answered, carelessly, turning back with Mr. Stanton. Hilda went into the house, very ill-satisfied; that, "as long as you need me," being peculiarly distasteful to her.

It seemed to Hilda that, after that day, Mr. Arle's manner towards her was always constrained and unnatural, like that of a person striving to conquer a repugnance he feels to be unjustifiable, yet cannot wholly subdue; she avoided him more than ever, and when they met, her manner was cold and had lost its frank kindness.

That formal compact of friendship seemed to come between all real friendliness. For a person so capricious in his conduct—so strange and perplexing in the treatment of herself—so constant and simple in other ways—Hilda could not entertain a quiet affection; she could not feel at ease in his presence.

Indifference being impossible, would she not, at last, entertain dislike? Was that what Mr. Arle wished to inspire?



CHAPTER XXV.

MR. ARLE came to the Cottage with a stormy face, one morning, some month or two after that July afternoon in the garden. It was a wet day. Alcina, busy with some marvellous piece of needle-work, was quietly seated at Hilda's side; she obtained but a hasty greeting from her friend.

"Where is your father, Miss Stanton?" Mr. Arle enquired.

"In the study, Mr. Arle," Hilda said, with a sigh—he worked too hard. "Is anything the matter?"

"Nothing in which you are likely to be interested."

Hilda's eyes drooped upon her book again, and Mr. Arle stood at the window, apparently watching the splashing rain-drops.

Turning suddenly to Alcina, he asked—

"How would you like to visit your Spanish estates, Alcy?"

"To go to Spain?"

"Yes."

“With you?”

“Yes.”

“How I should like it!”

There was fierce delight flashing from the bright eyes. Mr. Arle turned from them, looked at Hilda. Had she heard? She seemed to be reading, steadily; yet her hand grasped her book more firmly than there was any need.

“*Will* you take me, Mr. Arle?” Alcina whispered.

Hilda looked up to hear the answer.

“I think I will, Alcy, and soon.”

Alcina took the one of Mr. Arle’s hands she could reach, kissed it, and ran away to vent her wild joy out of his sight.

“You must take her now, Mr. Arle,” Hilda said, quietly.

“I see I must. I did not suppose she would much care to go. Any more than——” the rest of the sentence was lost. Mr. Arle went to seek Mr. Stanton: to him he explained that business he had hoped to be able to settle by letters obliged him to go to Spain, that he should start in a few days, but hoped not to be long absent; unless — of that unless Hilda heard soon enough.

Mrs. Danall, hearing of the proposal that had been made to Alcina, was ready to throw herself on her knees in vehement entreaty that the child would stay at home —not go to that dreadful country, where she would surely be made a Catholic, and shut up in a convent.

Miss Alcy was resolute, she would go. “Was it likely anything or any one could harm her, if Mr. Arle were with her, took care of her?” she asked, with a smile of

mingled scorn of such fears, and confidence in her guardian's will and power.

Mrs. Danall considered that "the master" would be a match for aught *but* the Pope and the devil; over his chance against them she shook her head.

"Beautiful Spain," was the burden of the child's thoughts and songs now.

"Beautiful Spain!" Hilda repeated, as she sat in her room one morning just before the day Mr. Arle had talked of leaving; then she sat idle, leaning her head on her hand; watching the floating of little white clouds over the blue heaven, and the whitening of the old poplars, as the autumn wind ruffled their leaves; those words were the starting-point of a long train of thought; of unprofitable thought, Hilda considered; she strove to rouse herself, arranged her papers, and dipped her pen in the ink, revised a few pages diligently, then fell a dreaming again. The course her thoughts now took, recalled to her the haggard, anxious look her father's face had worn the last few days; she remembered that, for a wonder, she had not heard Mr. Arle come into the house this morning; so she pushed her manuscript into her drawer, and went down stairs.

She found her father sitting by his study-table, his head leaned down upon his papers; Hilda stood still, chilled by fear; but Mr. Stanton had heard her enter, looked up with eyes contracted by suffering.

"It has come at last!" he said.

"Dear papa, are you ill?"

"Worn out, child, good for nothing."

"You have been over-trying your head, papa."

"I have done nothing for several days; I felt it coming; this utter numbness of the brain, I know what it means; it is bad enough, but it is not all," he continued, in answer to Hilda's look of pale inquiry.

"Papa, you only want rest, do not look so hopeless."

Mr. Stanton rose wearily, threw the casement window wide open, and leaned out.

"I thought Mr. Arle would be with you, or I should have come to ask you to go out; he always is with you now."

"Are you jealous, my child?" was asked with a sickly smile.

"A little, papa. But will you come out? It is a fresh, pleasant morning, it might do you good: I know you have been doing too much."

"It may do me good; get on your bonnet, we'll go—anywhere." Hilda returned directly. "We will try and get down to the beach," Mr. Stanton said, as they started—a choice Hilda regretted; her father seemed so feeble and the way was very rough. They reached the beach, however, and found a sunny sheltered nook to rest in.

Hilda recurred to the subject of her thought and dread. "Have you felt ill long, papa; in the way you do now?"

"I mentioned this dull pain to Winley last time he came to see me—that is an old trouble—I have never experienced this sensation of numbness till the last few weeks—this morning it seized me suddenly—it was as if cold, cruel fingers pressed heavily down upon my brain: the action of my heart ceased. The attack was just passing when you came in—I am sorry I alarmed you, child."

"It may be general weakness, papa; not disease peculiarly attacking the brain, as you think. You must quite give up writing for a long, long time, and be nursed patiently."

"As to giving up writing:—I cannot write a line."

"Have you said anything to Mr. Arle about this?"

"Jealous again, Hilda! No: he has told me I look ill, want change, and proposed a preposterous scheme."

"What is it?"

"He wants me to go with him to Spain; perhaps to pass a winter there."

Hilda started; then was silent. A strange conviction that this "preposterous scheme" would be carried into execution coming over her, filling her with great, grave dread.

"Would you like to go, papa?" she whispered, after a long pause; her cheek had grown very white.

"I have not given the matter a thought—it is quite impossible that I should go."

"Why impossible?"

"I cannot afford it—I cannot consent to be a burden to Arle—I cannot leave my children—I cannot—"

"Stop, papa, please! I wonder if it really would do you good." She dismally recalled last winter, Dr. Winley's having hinted at the possible necessity of another being passed in a warmer climate; and began to think that her father must go.

"You might afford it, papa; you need be no burden to Mr. Arle in that way; the money you had for your book is untouched—I have plenty for the present, we spend so little here;—you can leave us—leave Ernest to me, me

to myself. Papa! I begin to think that you ought to go."

"In my turn, I cry stop. How will you and Ernest live while I am away, spending, instead of earning money? You say you have plenty for the present; but you cannot have more than a few pounds."

"I have all that was paid me for the last story that was published, papa; it seemed a ridiculously large sum. Then, papa, my book is all but finished, and I think—I hope—it is better than anything else I have written. You said," she added, humbly, "that your publisher seemed willing to have it; that you thought it would succeed."

"Poor child! you to work for bread?"

"It is pleasant, papa. You know you say it is always more satisfactory to do what one does, of any kind, in an earnest, business-like manner, than to play at it. I am sure I have been infinitely happier working on it, than I could have been without the occupation it has given me."

"I am too idle for discussion. God bless you, child! If your manuscript is ready, Arle can take it to town when he goes; we shall hear what its fate may be; but—"

"Oh, papa! I should not like Mr. Arle to have anything to do with it!—do not ask him!" Hilda interrupted. She blushed at her father's look of surprise, and added—"It is not quite ready, either."

"As you please! Do not hurry it on any account: but your book published or not published, my going to Spain is out of the question."

"I do not think so, dear papa. But the wind is cold ; you had better not sit longer. We must ask Dr. Winley about this plan."

Mr. Stanton consented to lean on Hilda's arm, as they mounted the rocky path, proceeding homewards slowly, pausing many times to take breath. They had not progressed very far when Mr. Arle came striding down to meet them ; his strong arm was substituted for Hilda's weak one ; the way was too narrow for three, and Hilda fell behind, loitered, and looked back that she might dash away bitter, blinding tears that had gathered to her eyes. A great, heavy cloud of fear and pain seemed to have darkened down over her day. She felt some pangs of bitter self-reproach, too ; thought she had not watched over her father's health as she ought to have done ; had suffered pride, jealousy, and Mr. Arle to come between her and him.

When Mr. Arle took leave that evening, Hilda followed him from the room ; he did not notice this till her hand softly touched his arm. She shut the hall-door behind her, that Ernest might not hear, and they stood in the windy porch.

Mr. Arle glanced up curiously from the little hand, that slid off as soon as it touched his arm, to the face ; a pale, anxious face, eyes full of trouble met his : she had been hurt that he had not spoken to her first about his plan for her father, but forgot that now.

What could he do for her ? he asked in so gentle a tone that her eyes filled with the ready tears.

"I want to speak to you about papa ; he is very ill.

Is Dr. Winley clever? Would any one else do papa more good?"

"Your father is not worse—has not complained, has he? He looks ill and seems weak, but—"

"Oh! Mr. Arle, he is very ill; he suffers a great deal in his head, he told me only this morning, and—"

"Dear Miss Stanton, I trust you are needlessly alarmed. I have been prescribing a complete change. If you add your influence to mine we may prevail. We will talk of this another time. I have great confidence in Dr. Winley, but if you would like another opinion, I will send a message to Carnkon in the morning—to-night if you wish."

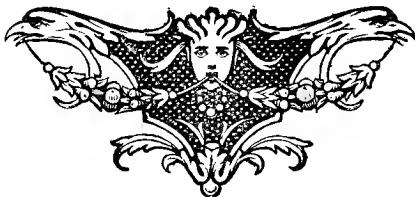
"No—can you ask Dr. Winley to come to-morrow? Papa is content with him."

"He shall come. Now, good night, you will take cold. Do not be over anxious; have faith and patience; make me of use in any way. Thank you for this confidence. Good night."

"Good night," Hilda returned, and went softly back into the house; Mr. Arle out into the windy night.

When Dr. Winley, coming next day, looked very grave about Mr. Stanton's case, and warmly approved the scheme of the journey to Spain, which Hilda privately mentioned to him, she began to regard it as an inevitable evil, a pain that would have to be borne. Without assigning any reason, Mr. Arle delayed his departure; he should go late in the autumn, he said; so Hilda had time to grow accustomed to the thought of the separation, and gradually to get her father to think of it as a possible, even probable, thing. In consequence of the postpone-

ment of his journey, Mr. Arle had to go to London, to remain some time, the day after Hilda had spoken to him about her father and her fears; so the two, father and daughter, were left to each other now. Hilda had not alarmed Ernest; he was constantly at the Poplars, as usual.





CHAPTER XXVI.

HE necessity of finishing her book pressed upon Hilda. Now its success had become so important to her, she feared far more than she hoped about it; sometimes her courage failed her utterly. She could not bring herself to leave her father at all now; the thought of how few more days they might spend together was always present to her; so it was at night that she worked; till, at last, she felt that her book was as perfect as she could make it, that she had spared no thought or labour. Then she laid it resolutely away; her father had not alluded to it again, she would not trouble him about it, she waited for Bernard's promised visit, meaning to entrust it to his care, relying on his willingness to help her.

Of course a little time spent thus, the days in anxious watching and nursing, and half the nights in mental labour, told upon Hilda. She looked now very many years older than on the night she had stood in her garden, looking so fixedly down into the Wynndale.

Alcina thought it the greatest favour to be allowed to sit by Mr. Stanton while he slept of an afternoon, and Hilda sometimes gave her the longed-for permission. The night on which Hilda had put the finishing touch to her tale, had left her still up when it gave way to dawn; so the day of that dawn, she was very worn and weary. It was a regular autumnal day; a wild west wind driving clouds of light rain before it, and Hilda felt an absolute thirst to feel the wind and rain on her aching brow. She went out in the afternoon leaving her father asleep, and Alcina sitting by him, very pleased and proud. The first gust of wind Hilda met as she passed from the garden into the open road, blew her bonnet back from off her head; disordered her hair, and inspired her with new strength; she went on quickly, holding up her face welcomingly to the wind and drizzling rain.

External objects looked dismal enough; a rainy sea, cloudy sky, misty moor and hills showing cloud-capped, when they showed at all. Everything of one dim, dull hue, but the wind was the strong spirit of life, battling with things adverse, and it woke a kindred strong life of hope in Hilda.

The wind was a glorious inspiration. Her thoughts would not linger over this present of dread and sorrow; they winged away to brighter time lying beyond. Hilda's step grew ever quicker, and her heart lighter, as she battled on.

At a sharp turn in the road Hilda and Mr. Arle met; he had just come home from London, and was hastening to the Cottage.

"I am very glad you are come back, Mr. Arle," Hilda said, in answer to his kind greeting.

He believed her, and was kinder yet ! He made many anxious enquiries about her father, then said—

“ And are you walking for pleasure, Miss Stanton ? ”

“ Yes, and for refreshment ; I have found both.”

“ Perhaps, after all ” (all what ? — Hilda might have asked), “ I shall have to own you as a kindred spirit. I like this weather, wind and drifting rain, and feel inclined to walk bare-headed in it—as you do, I see.” He glanced smilingly at the bonnet, which had not been replaced when the wind blew it off last, and then at the face it encircled ; a face wind-freshened, its clear hue and very delicate colour well set off by the dark-brown straw. There was admiration enough in the gentleness of Mr. Arle’s eyes to deepen the colour a shade.

“ Have you walked far enough ? ” he asked. “ I want to talk to you. Shall I turn, or will you ? ”

“ I will.” The thought of what Mr. Arle would most likely talk about made Hilda’s face grave directly.

They walked side by side in unbroken silence a while ; then Mr. Arle said, somewhat timidly for him—

“ Will you, can you, try to persuade your father to make this journey with me ? The complete change of climate, scenery, association, may do everything for him. Does it seem cruel of me to expect you to do anything towards bringing about a separation you will feel so severely ? I will not urge it—will not speak to him about it, unless you choose, till you have done so first. There is not much time to lose in making the decision ; for I shall have preparations to make, and a rough, stormy time seems to be setting in early.”

Hilda, turning from the wind to have this subject

pressed upon her consideration, seemed to turn from all hope and strength ; her cheek became deadly pale, her step faltering. She struggled with herself a while before she could look up and say—

“ I have spoken to papa about going ; you must help to persuade him. We shall succeed. He will go to Spain.”

“ And you will endeavour to trust him to me cheerfully —to believe that, rough as I am, I will prove a faithful nurse ? ” Hilda could not answer, and Mr. Arle continued,—

“ I know that this is asking much ; perhaps too much. After all I am but his friend, it must seem hard to you that any but yourself should care for him—I will be all that I can to him ; but I heartily wish—”

“ You are very good, of course it is hard to bear ; but my going is impossible.” Hilda said quietly.

“ And in spite of our occasional differences, you feel you can trust me ? ”

“ I do.” Hilda’s look of reliance was not to be mistaken, even by Mr. Arle. “ When shall you go ? ” she asked.

“ I hardly know ; I will delay as long as possible, unless Winley thinks your father should go at once. And you —what will you and Ernest do this winter ? ”

“ What shall we do ? ”

“ You will go and stay with friends, perhaps, till our return ? ”

“ Oh no ! we shall stay quietly at home.”

“ It will be lonely for you ; but you don’t much mind that—by the by, speaking of your friends reminds me, I

called at the post-office on my way and have a letter for you."

It was produced after a good deal of searching and held towards her.

"From Bernard!" she said, with a brightened face: she was going to put it in her pocket, preferring the hearing more of Mr. Arle's plans even to reading news of Bernard and Anna, but her companion said—

"Pray open your letter now, Miss Stanton: I am sorry I delayed giving it you so long."

Hilda glanced through it; Mr. Arle observed that her face brightened yet more as she did so; perhaps he envied anyone who had the power of giving her so much pleasure.

"You have good news, I hope?" he asked, as she refolded the letter.

"Very good news, thank you."

"Mr. Boynton talked of coming into this neighbourhood this autumn, did he not? He leaves it very late. Has he given up the intention?"

"No! he is coming in a day or two; he has been quite unexpectedly detained."

"He appears to be a great favourite of Ernest's."

"Yes! and of papa's and mine also. I hope you may see enough of him to really know him; then you will like him, too."

"Thank you! but I take few likings," was the dry answer. Mr. Arle added—"No doubt this is an 'excellent young man,' yet it may chance I shall not form (and I do not feign) friendship. My hand is large, but I can't grasp that of every friend's friend, notwithstanding;

especially that of so fortunate an individual as a general favourite."

"Yet I shall hope you will like Bernard—he wishes for your friendship."

"Indeed! he told you so! Did you teach him how to gain it?"

"I had no knowledge to impart." Hilda coloured slightly, remembering her conversation with Bernard. Mr. Arle noticed it, shed a benign look down upon her, yet his face clouded over as he said, in a "queer" voice—

"Yet, Miss Stanton, you know, we are friends."

They had reached the Cottage, Hilda, opening the door, said—

"I must tell my news to papa, if he is awake. I want a more sympathizing listener."

"I will prove a most sympathizing listener; for instance, I want to know, are your friend and Mrs. Meynard still on good terms? Stay!" he commanded, as she was going into the parlour; "your cloak is very wet."

He condescended to help her to remove it; then asked—"Where is Alcina?"

A dark head, peeping into the hall, announcing—"Your papa is just awake!" answered that question. Mr. Arle called the little girl to him. Hilda left them, and went to her father. She read Bernard's letter to him. From it breathed so much healthy, hopeful life, that Mr. Stanton's mood brightened, as Hilda's face had done, while he listened. He and Hilda talked over the letter—Anna and Bernard's prospects—very cheerfully for some while.

Where was Mr. Arle? Hilda wondered—he did not make his appearance.

“Mr. Arle has been gone a long time. He said you and your papa had a great deal to talk about, and that he would come to breakfast to-morrow.” Alcina announced, in answer to Mr. Stanton’s question, she had come gliding in to know if Ernest had returned from the Poplars: she wanted Ernest.

“How strange of Arle! What have we to talk about, Hilda?—only this letter?” Mr. Stanton said.

“No, papa; there is something else—a decision to be made. You are tired now; we will have tea, and talk about it in the evening.”

“I am not tired, child; but you are, by your look.”

Hilda paused on her way from the room, to watch a little elfish figure rushing about in the garden—black hair streaming wildly on the wind, just catching the watery smile the sun gave ere it set. Hilda heard, or fancied she heard, that Alcina was singing the Spanish song, of whose burden she was now heartily sick and weary. Presently the little figure danced up to the gate—Alcy met Ernest there—stood shaking the wet from her hair, and telling him something with animated gesticulation.

Hilda smiled, noting the superior air with which Ernest looked down upon the face raised to his. As they came into the house together, she heard him say—

“I did not think you would have been so delighted to leave us, Alcy.”

Alcina paused, struck by a new aspect of the matter—

grew quiet, and came creeping softly upstairs after Hilda, with a thoughtful face.

“Not kind of you, brother mine, to dash a cup of pleasure from such tiny hands, such young lips!” Hilda thought. In the evening she noticed Alcina steal up to Ernest’s side. Ernest was studying; Alcina spoke twice, then softly touched his hand. The boy looked up somewhat impatiently, but the little girl’s eyes were full of tears, and he asked, kindly enough—

“What is it, Alcy?”

“Only, Ernest, I am *not* glad to leave you; if I thought you much minded my going, I’d stay at home.”

“You are a good little girl, and I shall miss you; but you must go to Spain, you will like it, and it is right you should go. You will have Mr. Arle, and will very soon come home again,” Ernest said, condescendingly.

“Yes! I shall have Mr. Arle,” Alcy admitted.

“Now go away, there’s a dear! my book is very hard, and I must go on with it.”

Ernest patted her head patronizingly, and she went back to Hilda; often casting reverent glances towards the young student, who, his smooth brow puckered into a perplexed frown, his elbows on the table and his hands in his hair, looked fiercely industrious.

Presently Hilda left the two together, and went to her father; she plunged desperately into the matter, which she knew Mr. Arle expected she should discuss with Mr. Stanton that evening. She tried by all means to win from him the consent she dreaded his giving. Mr. Stanton was feeble; his opposition was languid; she had almost succeeded when she left the subject for that while:

afraid of over-exciting and fatiguing him. Mr. Arle's arguments would prevail easily; her father would go; poor Hilda's heart quailed at the thought of this separation as much as if she felt that it would be a final one; yet if any such dread came to her, it was as a veiled visitant, whose features she durst not uncover.





CHAPTER XXVII.

“**D**o you remember how I felt about our first coming here, Arle ? that if you had decided we were to come, come we should. It is the same now, my will—by no means a weak one—gives way before yours,” Mr. Stanton said, wearily.

“ Nay ! not before mine alone ; do not say I persuade you to this step—your daughter.”

“ Ay, poor child ! she pleaded well ; but then, perhaps, you had won her over, and I heard you speak through her.”

“ In that you are greatly mistaken ; Miss Stanton has great independence of character, will never be a blind instrument of any one else’s will.”

“ It is fortunate for her that it is so ; though you speak as if you thought ‘ self-will in a woman pestilent.’ I have always found my child willing to be led by any who had won her confidence ; it is well she doesn’t give that lightly ; she may have a stern battle of life to fight, will need all her strength.”

Mr. Stanton leaned back in his easy-chair, and looked listlessly out into the bright day ; he did not see Mr. Arle's restless movement : how he seemed by a strong effort to keep back words that rose to his lips.

“Thank you, papa, for being my champion,” Hilda had entered quietly and heard what her father said : both he and Mr. Arle turned quickly at her voice.

“Indeed, young lady, your champion had light labour, a shadow to fight ; as best suits his present power. Your father is tired after our long talk ; but all is settled as you wish Miss Stanton.”

“As I wish !” Hilda echoed softly :—then she obeyed her father's gesture, sat down by his side ; not idle but plying her needle with feverish diligence—Mr. Arle told her what was the latest day it was wise to fix ; then saying he had much business to arrange, he took his leave. Hilda did not look up as she said good-morning ; though he tried to make her.

Next day Bernard Boynton came. He made Hilda's heart ache ; involuntarily betraying how much he was shocked at the alteration the last three months had made in Mr. Stanton's appearance. Ernest had been spared the knowledge of the extent of his father's illness, and of the proposed separation impending in the little family, as long as possible ; he was the only one who could enjoy Bernard's visit, and he did so thoroughly. Bernard gave him praise and encouragement enough to cheer him onward ; but showed him so much to be done that a sense of the shortness of life smote his young spirit for the first time. We hear that “life is short” and feel that it is long, till we become impressed by the importance

of work we must do in it. Now Ernest looked back with regret on time wasted, as he thought, in lounging and lingering on the moor, by the shore, listening to the under-tones of Nature, watching her varying expressions. But time so spent was not lost. "Il mondo è un bel libro, ma poco serve à chi non sa leggere." Ernest did not know how to read it.

Bernard could stay but a short time, and he and Ernest were always out together as long as day-light lasted; so he saw little of Hilda or Mr. Arle; had not much opportunity of endeavouring to storm the latter's castle of friendship. The few times they met they agreed better than Hilda had thought they would. Bernard said he felt himself more than ever attracted towards Mr. Arle: he was enthusiastic in his artistic admiration of the rugged massiveness of the noble head, could see nothing to find fault with in a face dignified by so grand a brow; and, when its owner's mood was sunny, lighted by a pair of eyes whose gleam could fall bright and warm as summer light. Yet Bernard, full of hope for his own great happiness, and desiring similar bliss for his friends, wondered if Mr. Arle's heart were cold, or pre-occupied, that he could apparently preserve perfect indifference while brought into daily contact with Hilda, and thought Hilda seemed strangely blind to what was great and admirable in showing Mr. Arle so little favour.

Bernard was obliged to leave much too soon for Ernest; the two had a walk to the Poplars together, and a long talk on the last morning. Ernest's greatest ambition now was, in a year's time, to obtain his father's consent to his living and studying with Bernard. This talk made

Bernard look grave. “In a year’s time!” How many changes might have taken place—might not this boy be fatherless?

But Bernard tried to put away all gloomy thoughts when he met Hilda in the garden. Mr. Arle was with her father; she wanted to speak to Bernard alone. After a turn or two up and down the path, they went to the favourite seat.

“I want you to do me a service, Bernard,” Hilda said, as she sat down wearily.

“That is right! that will be a true pleasure—anything—do not hesitate; I am your elder brother, you know,” was the hearty answer.

“You are very kind: to come to the point quickly then—for mine is not a very modest request—I want you to take charge of my MS., and get your father, who is used to such negotiations, to take it to papa’s publisher, and make the best arrangements he can about it—only I want it out soon.”

“Both I and my father shall hold your trust as an honour; it is just the kind of commission papa will enjoy executing.”

“I hope it will not give him much trouble.”

“Oh, Hilda! you don’t know how much more than this any of us would like to do for you!—you won all our hearts.”

“It is pleasant to think so. I like to preserve all the friends I once make.”

“The Boyntons were not cast in a fickle mould—‘True, till death,’ used to be my father’s motto.”

“Yes, I should think his a constant nature,” Hilda re-

plied, absently ; perhaps thinking of another who might well wear such motto.

“ But it is time I was off ! ” Bernard said, springing up. “ How little I have seen of you ! I shall fervently hope for good news of Mr. Stanton. You must write to some of us ; I know Esther is a bad correspondent. Shaking hands is such a cold form, let me, this once ! ” So saying, he touched the hand offered him with his lips.

Steps and voices sounded close by. As they rose, they met Mr. Arle and Mr. Stanton, arm-in-arm, just come out on to the sunny, sheltered walk.

Hilda coloured from momentary fear of misapprehension ; Bernard, quite free from embarrassment or annoyance himself, noticed this and something in Mr. Arle’s face which made him, at the last moment, waver in his opinion of their mutual indifference. He had a moment or two’s talk with Mr. Stanton while Hilda went into the house to fetch the parcel to be entrusted to him.

“ Anna will be delighted at the prospect of reading your book ! ” Bernard said, so betraying what it was she gave him.

“ That is your manuscript, then, child ! When did you finish it ? ” her father asked.

“ A few days since, papa.”

“ I went to London a few days since, Miss Stanton ; you could not entrust so precious a thing to me,” Mr. Arle said.

“ It was not ready ; but if it had been, I should not have troubled Mr. Arle about business so distasteful to him,” Hilda answered, with heightened colour. Bernard looked from one to the other, a smile of amusement

quivering on his lip. Hilda's colour heightened yet more; as, while Mr. Stanton said a last good-bye to Bernard, Mr. Arle observed—

“ You have broken faith, young lady. You were to believe that in *anything* I would serve you.”

“ I made no promise to act upon that belief, to avail myself of your services.”

“ An unworthy evasion of the spirit of our compact.”

Hilda did not answer. Bernard went. Mr. Stanton took Mr. Arle's arm and returned to the house.

After that day, Ernest was no longer exempt from his share of pain. Very rapidly the day fixed for the dreaded departure drew on; Hilda had to keep up the boy's courage, always to speak cheerfully and hopefully to him and to her father.

Even when alone, she was outwardly still and quiet, the thought in her heart being—how should she bear this separation?—its prayer for strength to bear anything that might come to her.

Mr. Arle was considerate of the son and daughter's natural desire to have their father all to themselves these last days, and was but little at the Cottage. Hilda secretly thanked him for this. On the very day before the departure, however, he came early in the afternoon, when Mr. Stanton had just fallen into a doze. The study-door open, Hilda was sitting at work in the parlour-window, completing something she had been making for her father. Mr. Arle sat down opposite her, and, speaking in a low, quiet voice that could not disturb the sleeper, told her of arrangements made for her father's comfort on the voyage, and of preparations for his reception at its

conclusion. Hilda gave the few necessary answers without raising her eyes ; her heart was full of sad, grateful wonder—how should a man think of all these little things ? But this was a time of repression, not expression, of any kind of emotion. Silence fell.

Hilda worked on ; Mr. Arle planted his arms on the table, rested his chin on them, and watched the busy white fingers from beneath his shaggy brows, forgetting how fixedly. Silence lasted so long that there mingled with poor Hilda's other pain a fear that Mr. Arle thought her insensible, ungrateful, and was offended ; she lifted her eyes up at last, timidly ; they met his. Hers shone through tears—tears that the dull aching at her heart made rise, and would not let fall ; in his there was an intensity of expression she did not seek to understand, which thrilled to her heart, touched it to the overflowing of its anguish.

The work was dropped ; Hilda's forehead bowed down upon her pale, cold hands. But the time when she might give way was not come yet : after a moment or two—after a little stifled sob or two, she lifted up her head proudly and determinedly.

Mr. Arle reached out his hand to her ; hers went trembling into it—lay there quietly. Mr. Arle's face was troubled, his lips compressed firmly ; when he spoke, it was in a strange, measured way at first.

“ You must look over this gloomy winter,” he said. “ Look on—brighter prospects will open before you—they must, you are so young and gifted. Do not look pained, indignant.” (The little hand struggled vainly to get free.) “ God knows that I would give my life for his—

that I am your friend—that—child I would to Heaven that you knew all; I—a little more.” He broke off.

Hilda’s face flushed; grew pale and stern; she steadily returned his gaze; suddenly her eyes fell before his, the glow of colour returned. Extricating her hand from his loosened grasp, she said, confusedly, “I do not understand, Mr. Arle,” gathered up her work, and went away to her own room, where she threw herself down by her bedside, bewildered.

The room grew as dusky as her perplexed thoughts—as chill as her trembling heart. She seemed to crush her folded arms down over some new consciousness of pain; but it was no time for recognizing any fresh fear.

Before all the twilight had faded, Hilda rose, planted her feet firmly on the floor—as if she felt she trod an enemy beneath them—smoothed her disordered hair, and went down with, at least, a calm face—a proud face, Mr. Arle thought.

She returned her father’s tenderly-enquiring look bravely—bore up valiantly all through that last evening. Mr. Arle left as soon as Hilda re-appeared.

“Have you been quarrelling again?” Mr. Stanton asked Hilda, noticing something peculiar in their good night.

“Not exactly—misunderstanding each other, I fancy.”

“Shall you be glad to see less of this troublesome friend of mine, my child?” There was a little scrutiny in Mr. Stanton’s glance.

“I do not know, papa,” Hilda said, quite truly. She did not know—she did not dare seek to know.



CHAPTER XXVIII.

HEY were gone ! Hilda knew that ; but did not yet feel it. She and Ernest stood at the garden-gate. A chill wind blew on their uncovered heads—shed down some dead leaves on them ; but they stood still, looking towards the way the travellers had taken. Ernest's arm was round his sister's waist, and his head laid against her shoulder.

There was the white look of something like despair on Hilda's face ; the sharp blast seemed to blow through and through her. She did not heed its being cold till Ernest gave a shuddering sigh ; then, her arm encircling him, she turned towards the house.

The parlour showed many signs of the recent and hurried departure. Ernest glanced round it ; then looked at Hilda ; he saw so little sign of hope or comfort anywhere, that, spite of his new manfulness, he gave expression to his sense of desolation ; sobbed aloud.

Hilda had sunk into a chair by the fire ; sat quiet, looking into it ; the sound of Ernest's bitter sobbing,

roused her to the recollection that some one was yet dependent on her for support and consolation. She had great influence over the boy's every mood ; she used it skilfully now ; she made him come to her side, talked and induced him to talk, led his thoughts on towards the future, caused him to look forward cheerfully and hopefully, as she could not.

After an hour or so, the boy rose up, brave and resolute; full of energy to meet and conquer sorrow and difficulty, and to work out his ardent ambition. In sign of his new courage he took his cap and set out for his studio at the Poplars.

With him departed all immediate cause for effort, or restraint.

Hilda sat with her white face turned towards the fire ; her white hands folded on her knee. The servant came in, cleared up the room, looked at her mistress, and went away without having spoken to her, awed by her look.

The deep stillness of the house seemed to deaden Hilda's faculties. She resisted the numbness stealing over her ; weighed upon by a desire to look her dreaded future calmly in the face at once ; to realise the worst it might bring, and imagine how that might be borne.

She had better have avoided such self-torture. It was too much. The aspect of all things darkened and darkened to a blackness that was intolerable. Her head fell against the back of the chair ; physical pain contracted her face ; the mouth grew rigid ; the lids were crushed down over aching eyes.

If she had thought herself strong and resolute, she learnt that she was weak. It was realising the bitterness

of Death in Life—experiencing the agony of loss (for in this hour she had no hope) without the sense of irrevocability and inevitability, by which Death can calm while he chills heart and brain. Consciousness failed her.

“Is this your calm endurance—your quiet faith?”

The words sounded through a Death-dream, part of it, perhaps. There was wild fear, and no recognition in her eyes when they opened; it was but part of her confused dream; she would sleep again.

“Hilda! Miss Stanton! rouse yourself pray!”

Warm breath was on her cold cheek; the level ray of blue eyes pierced into her night. It was a real voice then! But she roused up slowly, as a child from sleep, passed her hands over her eyes, and sighed wearily.

“Are you ill?—Can you hear me?”—Mr. Arle asked.

She started now, and stood up; stood, holding by the chair, tried to see Mr. Arle; to remember what had happened last; how long it was since her father had left. The room whirled round faster and faster; a black mist was over everything; she sickened, and lost her hold of the chair—would have fallen, but a strong arm caught her.

Mr. Arle replaced her in her chair; got water, and dashed over her face: there was more impatience than tenderness in his manner. But her resolution conquered her weakness very soon: she pushed her wet hair back from her forehead, and asked—

“What is it, Mr. Arle? Is anything forgotten? Anything the matter? Papa?”

“Nothing is the matter—only this packet was forgotten. Your father had prepared it to leave with you. In the

hurry of departure, he took it away; he had spoken to you about its contents?"

"Yes, oh! yes!" This was one of the trifling acts of *preparation* that had filled the poor heart with such foreboding.

"And was this all that brought you back, Mr. Arle? There was no other message—nothing?"

"Nothing! You think I might have sent this instead of bringing it?"

"Yes."

"Your father was resting; Alcina was with him. He was pleased that I should ride back to see you again, that he might learn something more of you. And I—in our hurried departure you hardly noticed me this morning—I am glad to be able to assure you again that, spite of my roughness, you may trust me—nothing shall be neglected, no care forgotten. Do you hear me? Will you trust me?"

"I *do* trust you, Mr. Arle; you know I do—but I have so little hope, it is so—"

With one hand she covered her face; the other she extended to him. He took it, looked down on it pityingly, it was so cold, so dead-looking; he chafed it gently, saying—

"Courage, courage, poor child! Have you any last command for me? Any message for your father?"

She looked up imploringly.

"Only let me hear very often. I shall live for those letters—some one must write often."

"You shall hear constantly—trust me, you shall."

"And tell papa that Ernest bears up—that he is gone to his work—that I will strive to make him happy."

“And your father will ask about you. May I say that the first, worst grief is past? It is hard to leave you, Hilda, when I feel as if, for once, you needed me.”

“I shall be better to-morrow—stronger.”

He held her hand still—that intensity of tenderness was gathering into his eyes. Hilda did not see it, grief dimming all things to her.

“I must go; as it is I shall need to ride fast.”

Hilda stood up, he took her other hand; but she trembled so he put his arm round her slightly instead, and drew her nearer. With a child’s feeling of weariness and of readiness to lean against the first support, Hilda let her head rest against his arm a moment.

Her attitude, its quiet dependence; her loneliness and hopelessness powerfully agitated his great heart, he controlled himself, just touched her brow with his lips, said—

“God bless and keep you, dear child!” gently replaced her in the chair, and then she heard his horse’s feet sounding further and further away.

That meeting and parting were as a calm, restful interlude in a troubled dream. She sat where he left her, looking out into the wild, dying day; the touch of his lips felt upon her brow. Daylight was waning, when, at last, she moved, remembering that Ernest would soon be home; that home must look as cheerful as might be.

Hilda passed no more such days of self-indulgent grief; she did not try to steel her spirit, but to give her fate quietly into God’s keeping, and to keep diligently busy.

The first possible opportunity brought her a few lines from her father, written in a most hopeful spirit, and a

letter from Alcy to “dear, dear Hilda,” full of all sorts of brilliant anticipations.

Dr. Winley called a day or two after Mr. Stanton left, bringing his wife with him. Hilda had just seen her before, and found her too shy to be very interesting; but to-day Dr. Winley left her to pass the afternoon at the Cottage, and Hilda, perhaps because she was so lonely, perhaps because Mrs. Winley was really a most attractive little lady, felt her heart warm to her, so thoroughly that the two soon forgot that they were not old friends.

“It was very kind of you, Mrs. Winley, to come so far to see me this stormy day,” Hilda said, as her guest nestled down cosily in the arm-chair by the fire.

“You must not thank me, Miss Stanton; I didn’t come of my own accord; to tell the truth, I didn’t want to come.”

“It was kind of Dr. Winley to persuade you to come, then.”

“Dr. Winley hadn’t much to do with it, he only said, ‘Lucy! I’m going to call on Miss Stanton; will you come?’ It was Mr. Arle who made me promise, a day or two before he left, that I would come and see you sometimes. Oughtn’t I to have been offended; for he gave me to understand that he didn’t ask me, because he thought you and I would suit each other particularly well, but because he didn’t know any one you would like better, and thought you would be lonely; you were looking ill, too, he said; now, wasn’t his a complimentary speech?”

“Complimentary to whom?” Hilda asked, smiling.

“The real compliment was for you—but I have known

Mr. Arle too long to feel offended ; to do him justice he didn't mean anything slighting—he never willingly hurts anyone's feelings, especially a woman's. Mr. Arle is a very great favourite of mine, you must know, Miss Stanton ; perhaps you will be tired of hearing me talk about him sometimes—you cannot think how nice he is to children, so tender and gentle."

"Indeed !" Hilda said, somewhat dubiously, remembering how his want of tenderness towards Alcina had formerly pained her.

"Yes ! indeed he is ! I don't mean that he kisses them a great deal and is fond of them in that way—No ! I am half angry sometimes because he doesn't kiss my sweet little Lucy : but he is so considerate, which strong men are not always. I have seen him lift up dirty little creatures in the street and set them down on their mother's door-step, so gently ; or stop and inquire the trouble of some squalling, most unattractive-looking morsel of humanity—it isn't every gentleman would do those kind of things, you know."

"Certainly not," Hilda answered—she looked sufficiently interested to encourage the talkative little lady to run on.

"Some of the Liston ladies consider Mr. Arle 'quite a bear,' because he is careless in his dress, and doesn't care for their musical tea-parties ; but the poor women will tell you 'he's the nicest, kindest, politest gentleman as ever was'—he would think nothing of holding a poor woman's basket, bundle, or baby while she got over a stile, if he were near—so I think Mr. Arle is a real gentleman, don't you ?"

“Yes—that is true politeness.” Hilda’s looks more than her words opened the heart of the doctor’s bonnie wife.

“You will be amused at my saying so much,” she said, with a blush; “but so few people understand Mr. Arle, or know how good he is—and I should like *you* to, Miss Stanton. I owe him a very great deal. When we first came to Liston, Edward and I—dear me! I don’t know how many years ago, but a great many!—Mr. Arle was just come to Seadonfell, from travelling abroad. It must be about six years since, for his little ward was a tiny thing, and I only just married. Mr. Arle took a great deal of notice of me, in his grave way, and was a great deal at our house; and Edward—dear, foolish fellow!—was jealous! I laugh about it now, but it made me miserable enough then. I was a giddy young thing, not good enough for Edward—just come from a home where I had an endless number of merry brothers and sisters; so when I’d only Edward, and he grew so stern and cross, I was utterly miserable. I never imagined he was jealous of this sad, grave Mr. Arle, as he was then. The more sulky Edward was, the more glad I felt when any one else was with us, and I never could hide what I felt; so things grew worse and worse! I don’t know what mightn’t have happened! We were all in the dark you see. One day, Mr. Arle came in, found me crying, and Edward was very rude to him; then he appeared to rouse up from a dream, and to understand it all at once. He soon set all straight, and made me the happiest little wife in the world again. Can you guess why he had been fond of seeing me?”

“I think I can,” Hilda said, looking into Mrs. Winley’s sunny blue eyes.

“I was so much like his lost love. Of course, you know the story?”

“Parts of it.”

“She could never have been worthy of him, now, could she?”

“I do not know all; I cannot judge her.

“Why, it was only just a few months before the day fixed for her wedding with Mr. Arle, that she ran away with a Spanish gentleman she met where she was visiting! She had been engaged to Mr. Arle two years; her father put off the wedding till the young lover should be of age, and Flora eighteen! A juvenile affair, wasn’t it?”

“Do you think she loved Mr. Arle?”

“From what I have heard, it seems as if she must have done all the time. I do not understand it.

“There was a foreign governess living at the Poplars—it was found out afterwards that she was a bad woman—she hated Mr. Arle. She was always stealing and spying about, and, it was fancied, had most likely overheard him say to Flora’s mother that he did not think her a fit companion for a young girl, and hated him for this, and resolved to be revenged. She obtained great power over this poor Flora. Mr. Arle was grave and reserved, even then, and this woman called him cold and tyrannical—did all she could to prejudice her young pupil against him. One of the young Elscombes, of the Manor—a family who were a great deal at the Poplars—came home from abroad, bringing young Castello with him, and he fell violently in love with the pretty English girl. He bribed

the governess to help him, and she was ready enough. Mr. Arle was away, engaged in London about some business connected with his marriage. Flora and the governess went to stay at the Manor. The poor child heard her true-hearted lover ridiculed by the gay Miss Elscombes. Her governess persuaded her he could not love. She was always pursued by the vehement passion of Castello; so she was led on gradually to the last fatal step. Isn't it sad, dreadful to think of? God forbid I should judge her hardly! she was so little more than a child." Tears were in the pretty blue eyes, in Hilda's dark ones, too.

"And afterwards—she died in Spain—did not her husband treat her kindly? Mrs. Danall is naturally prejudiced against him; but he could, surely, not have been cruel to the poor child he had taken away from her home?"

"Mr. Arle does not believe he was unkind; but she, poor thing! how could she be happy? He loved her, even, in a way that frightened her—then he saw that she was not happy; that she had loved her English lover. They each found out how the wicked governess had deceived them! He grew wild and jealous, but it was her own remorse, most likely, that killed her. She died giving birth to a second child—it died, too. Her husband did not dare disobey her last request that their little girl should be sent at once to England, and its grand-parents had left their property to Mr. Arle—so he became the child's guardian."

"And, I suppose, Alcina is like her father?"

"Mr. Arle thinks so. Now, I am not hard-hearted, I

think poor Flora should be far more pitied than blamed ; but I have been angry sometimes that such a man as Mr. Arle should take a kind of pride in being faithful to the memory of a young fickle girl. I have so longed to see him married and happy, with some one to love him as he deserves—some one he could love with all his great heart ! I have seen very little of him lately ; but I have not been very jealous ! He has been a great deal here, has he not ? ” Mrs. Winley asked, naïvely.

“ Yes ! he and my father are very great friends,” Hilda replied, gravely, steadily returning the gaze of the blue eyes—they drooped, their owner rose somewhat hastily, saying, that she must run home now, or her Edward would have to wait for his dinner—but she did stop to urge Hilda to come and see her often, and Hilda promised that she would.





CHAPTER XXIX.

EHE next news of the travellers was received within a few days of the first. This time their letters were dated from the place which was their journey's end.

Dr. Winley called it, on the whole, a favourable account that Hilda and Ernest received: the invalid had borne the journey with less appearance of exhaustion than had been anticipated: the novelty and beauty of the scenery kept him interested and excited. It was evident he was far more hopeful about himself than he had been.

Ernest talked gaily and confidently of spring and return, and of what should then be done. Hilda listened, answered when need was cheerfully, but did not question her heart to find out how it felt. Even when a third and fourth letter had been received, it was still too soon, Dr. Winley said, to build up any sanguine hopes of what the change of climate might effect: this extreme cautiousness betrayed to Hilda more of his fear than she had known before.

Hilda kept herself restlessly busy—ceaselessly employed; she did not dare own to herself that she was preparing for a future she feared to look at—a future in which Ernest might have only her to look to—but so it was. When, this was often, she was too sad-hearted to write, she found that she could study. As far as books went, ample means were at her disposal. She had access to the library at the Poplars, the wealth of which filled Mrs. Danall with dismay. For the sake of being with Ernest, she often stayed for hours in the room where he painted, engaged with musty old tomes. The comparatively modern and much better selected library at Mr. Arle's own house was of more use; and this, too, was open to her and Ernest.

But “cultivating one's mind” all by oneself, having no one to rejoice with over its fruits, is dull work. A studious life is a dreary life. What woman would not prefer the homeliest ministrations to the needs of the best loved? Hilda grew weary often—often despairing; but she had to conquer herself, and go on as calmly as if she were at ease, content. A gleam of encouragement visited her before very long.

She had many wet, windy and bitter cold walks to the post-office at Liston; on one of these she was disappointed in a rather unreasonable expectation of a Spanish letter, but she received one from Bernard Boynton. She had heard no news of her literary venture; this letter would contain some. So much depended upon its success or failure!—her heart trembled!

When she was on her homeward road—taking no further heed of the cutting sleet driven against her by

the east wind, than to turn so that the paper might not be rent by it—she opened and read her letter.

On that desolate road, late in the wild, wintry afternoon, she was as much alone as if she had been fast-locked in her chamber. The letter finished, she yielded to the moment's impulse of devout gratitude—knelt down upon the cold and wet wayside, lifted her eyes and her heart upward, thanking God for the power put into her hands, praying that it might ever be consecrated to holiest purposes.

She very soon rose, turned her steadfast face homeward, never once bowing it before the beating storm ; her arms were close folded over a heart swelling high with great joy, and tears of glad gratitude filled her eyes.

The afternoon had darkened very early. Ernest, driven from his work some time ago, and uneasy at her absence, was setting out to meet her when she reached the gate.

There was no letter from Spain ; she had been foolish in expecting one, she told him. She went up-stairs to take off the wet cloak and bonnet, and shake the hail from her hair. That was quickly done ; then, as she warmed her numbed hands at the fire, she told Ernest that she had heard from Bernard—that his letter contained very good news.

“ What ! that he and Anna are married, at last ? ”

“ No ! but that will be all in good time, too, I dare say ; but I mean good news for me, especially. My book will be out very soon, and I shall receive a much larger sum for it than I had at all expected. You see, my good news is only about that base thing—money ! It does not seem to please you, dear ? ”

She looked up at a boyish face, which now wore a look of man's trouble and impatience.

"It is good news, though, Ernest, dear ; I will tell you one reason. You know," she said—a slight warm colour, brought into the face by the fire, or by the power of recollection—"you know that Mr. Arle rode over with a packet papa had forgotten to leave with me :—only a few days since I discovered that the money papa was to take with him was returned to us then ; of course, I do not know if this was done with papa's knowledge or not, but that money is untouched, and, under almost any circumstances, would remain so." Hilda talked, looking straight into the fire, before which she knelt ; there was a little proud lifting up of the head as she spoke. "Now, dear, I shall return that money to papa, and tell him my news —how I shall have more money than you and I can spend in a year—and so he will be relieved from having the very least anxiety for us on this account. Is not this pleasant ?" She turned to him, laid her hand on his knee, but the moody face did not brighten.

"What displeases you, Ernest ?"

"It does hurt me to think of you, my sister Hilda, writing for money—earning money in any way !"

"Dear boy ! it is wrong pride, this !—Ernest, conquer it. I would not have told you, if I thought it would trouble you. But, dear, I was so glad, that I longed to tell some one. We two must learn to have no secrets from each other."

"But it troubles me bitterly to think of my uselessness ;—you are a woman, and you to work for me !"

"When you are a man, a good, great, true man, you.

shall work for me ! Think of that time and be patient of the present humiliation, if so you feel it. You will be able to repay me a thousand-fold any services I may have done you. I will step down gladly to my woman's dependent position, when you step up upon your platform of manly strength and activity."

"Now, Hilda, are you laughing at me ?"

"No, dear. I am just a little amused at your display of impatience—masculine impatience of dependence ; and shall be glad if you will smile at it ; but, indeed, you may pain me deeply, trouble our peace together, if you cherish such thoughts."

"You know, Hilda, that I would not pain you ; that I love you and am proud of you."

"Then you must rejoice with me now that I rejoice."

"Well ! I will. As you say, it will be pleasant to return that money for papa to use, and to know that he won't be anxious."

Hilda rose from her knees and kissed the proud young brow, and the talk ended peacefully.

The dark winter days passed slowly ; walks to the post-office and occasional visits to Dr. Winley's house, were Hilda's greatest external excitements ; Hilda found pleasure in listening to the chat of the winsome young mother, and in playing with her three very pretty children ; but sometimes this pleasure would be drowned in bitter pain, when Dr. Winley's face looked gravely compassionate, and he shook his head over the last account Hilda had received of her father's symptoms. Mrs. Winley scolded him once, when Hilda left them heart-

sick with apprehension, for letting her see so plainly what he feared.

“I am looking on to the end, Lucy, preparing her for that ; you, dear, are only thinking of the present,” he answered.

But a few days later Mrs. Winley said,—

“I do trust that, for once, you are mistaken—this was such a much better report. Do be hopeful, and let poor Hilda be so.”

“It was a much better report. As spring comes on they will try the hill district ; he may rally, come home, and live for a few years—God knows ! But this winter must have killed him had he stayed.”

Spring came on ; the invalid was removed to a hilly district, and rallied yet more ; but, at this time, Mr. Arle’s letters—Mr. Stanton could not often write now—filled Hilda with dread ; not from what they said, so much as from what she inferred from their tone.

“Keep up your courage, your trust, dear children,” he wrote once. “Hilda, how often you are by me ! not full of energy and will, but as I saw you last, pale and cold and voluntarily leaning on me a moment. Trust me so always—always—learn to lean on me always as on a true, strong friend.”

“O God !” Hilda cried in spirit, as she read those words, “he thinks, he knows, that I shall need one to lean on ! He sees that my father’s arm will fail from me for ever ! O Thou, Father in heaven, have pity !”

But hope reigned once more : as the days lengthened and grew warm and bright, Ernest’s talk was often of the exact *when* his father would come. He was not yet

strong enough for the journey, but each letter might say that he soon would be.

Mr. Arle's letters were more cheerful and less tender ; even Dr. Winley and Hilda began to entertain a near hope of the invalid's return, though both knew that it could be only an invalid, holding life on very short and precarious tenure, they would receive.





CHAPTER XXX.

HROUGH the balmy atmosphere of a fair evening, late in May, Hilda and Ernest came slowly home from the Poplars, both richly laden with flowers from the old garden.

“Hilda! I should not wonder if they are coming home—on the way; and that is why it is so much longer than usual since we heard.”

“It may be so, dear.”

“Do you not feel, sister, as if this hushed beauty were hinting at cause for greater joy? as if it promised more than it gives?”

“I know what you mean: our craving is only less infinite than God’s capacity for satisfying it; but, dear, remember few are satisfied in this life—not Dives but Lazarus was truly blessed.”

Yet Hilda’s heart was by no means untouched by the spirit of the hope breathing out from over all the land; hovering in likeness of soft-hued mist over the calm sea:—she and the boy trod the rest of the way in silence.

When they reached the Cottage, Ernest said he could not go in-doors yet ; he must go down to the shore for a little ; he heaped up his flowers upon those Hilda already carried ; laughed to see the pile of lilacs, lilies, May-roses, syringa, daffodils, hawthorn, narcissi, and other lowlier blossoms, reach up to the face bent down over them tenderly, and walked away, promising to be back very soon.

Hilda loitered up the garden ; her eyes bent upon her flowers. At the cottage-door Mrs. Winley met her—that lady was very often with Hilda now.

“Have you been here long, dear Mrs. Winley ? Isn’t Lucy with you ? she would have set up a shout at the sight of my treasures,” Hilda said.

“I haven’t been waiting long. No ! Lucy is at home this evening—it was too far, I mean I could not bring her, I—”

Something in her friend’s manner struck Hilda as strange—she looked up enquiringly, but the blue eyes were averted—they would not meet hers.

“Dear Mrs. Winley, is anything the matter ? You have been crying ! Is baby ill ? No ! or you wouldn’t be here. What is it ?—tell me quickly.”

There was no answer, save an hysterical sob.

Hilda leant against the wall, smitten with the sickness of sudden fear : her arms dropped down by her sides, and the flowers fell down and over her feet.

“You have news for me—tell it !” she said.

“Dear, dear Hilda, be calm !” Mrs. Winley replied, trembling and panting herself, as she came nearer Hilda. “Do not look so ! you frighten me !”

“For God’s sake, speak !” the poor girl gasped, strug-

gling against her deadly faintness, fearing it might overcome her ere she could hear and understand all.

“Mr. Arle is coming home soon, and Alcina—he—oh, Hilda! that stern, white face—I cannot!” She threw her arms round Hilda, and began to sob violently.

Gently, but determinedly, Hilda unclasped them, and made her way towards the parlour.

“One moment—wait one moment! and I will tell you all!—Oh, Heaven! it will kill her!”

The white face turned again towards the weeping one—a look of acute suffering in the dark, dilated eyes.

“She must know all, at once; your preparation is only torture,” some one standing behind her said.

Hilda turned sharply round, tottered a few steps towards the speaker, looked at him, half incredulously, a moment; then, when Mrs. Winley expected a wild passion of grief, she said, slowly—

“Mr. Arle—alone!” It was enough.

“Yes, alone.” He looked into her face, then threw his arm round her firmly, tried to lead her into the room. She clung to him a moment, as one in desperate danger of a fearful fall clings to any support; but the strong will was at work, she did not faint or cry; when she could see again, and feel that she stood on solid ground, she disengaged herself and turned to go.

“Do not grieve so,” she said, as she passed poor Mrs. Winley, who, cowering in a corner, was crying bitterly.

Mr. Arle followed Hilda; unheedingly he trampled over the fair, scattered flowers; she had avoided them. From his hiding-place in the parlour, he had seen the brother and sister part at the gate, noticed the way Ernest took.

and he understood that Hilda was going to him. Had she faltered, turned, or cried out, he would immediately have been at her side; but she went steadily on, and he only watched her from a distance. Ernest was coming home, singing through the twilight. Mr. Arle heard the song suddenly break off, saw the meeting, then he turned towards the house again. Leaning against a tree, burying his face in his hands, he gave way to one burst of terrible passionate pain, which shook the whole strong frame wofully.

He respected the first interchange of grief between the orphans; but did not dare leave them long. They had sat down on the grass by the way-side; the dew had fallen heavily; and, as he had watched her come up the garden with a serene brow and her arms full of flowers, Mr. Arle had thought that Hilda looked but frail.

Mr. Arle only went into the house to speak a few words to Mrs. Winley; then, picking up a shawl Hilda had dropped, he sought the brother and sister.

The light of the young moon was full on Hilda's face—she was the consoler; Ernest lay with his face buried in her lap, trying to stifle the expression of his anguish.

Mr. Arle approached, he put the shawl round Hilda, lifted up the boy and folded him in his arms; Ernest sobbed freely upon his breast. "You are mine now, my son," Mr. Arle said softly, thinking so to lessen an orphan's first anguished sense of loss and loneliness.

Hilda sat still; her face, turned to the light, showing full of quiet desolation—"Come!" Mr. Arle said, turning to her. She obeyed; he drew her arm through his, still

holding Ernest to him with the other. So he led the orphans to the house.

For the sake of doing something, Mrs. Winley and the servant had prepared tea. The poor little lady stayed to make it for the party of mourners, saw Mr. Arle put Hilda into the great chair, and, keeping Ernest by him, wait upon them both. Then she stole out to her husband ; weeping on his arm all the way home, contrasting her own wealth with the poverty of these two orphans. Hilda had not shed one tear, she felt as if in a nightmare dream ; she knew all when she turned and saw Mr. Arle ; the all was so mighty that her soul could not contain it—was swallowed up in it instead.

When he was alone with the brother and sister, Mr. Arle pushed away the table, the lamp on it seemed to pain Hilda ; he sat down near her, Ernest's head resting on his shoulder, and, speaking in a low voice, told them all he knew they would ask if they could. All about *the end* ; how rapidly but quietly it had drawn on—how full of prayerful peace, and yet of infinitely tender remembrance for his children, the dying father had been !

Hilda listened, now shed quiet tears ; Mr. Arle's reverent voice appeared to move her gently, without stirring up the depth of grief and regret she would yet have to bear to look down into. Ernest's occasional sob seemed out of harmony with the religious calm of the time.

It was late when Mr. Arle ceased speaking, and rose to go—even then he loitered. Hilda's tears had stayed ; he marvelled at, did not like, the steadfast look on the white face ; she was so full of thought she did not, apparently,

notice his movement. Ernest did, and again threw himself into the kind arms.

“I must say good-night, Hilda!” (He had learnt to name her so in writing to her; could not call her differently *now*). “You and this boy must go to rest—God send you sleep!”

Hilda rose, stood leaning against her chair; it seemed to her that something ought to be said by her—something of gratitude. She looked up at Mr. Arle, tried to speak, but sank down without having uttered one word. He pressed the hand she held out, and went away.

If Mr. Arle, according to his custom, loitered out on this first night of his return, it was surely his step that sounded to and fro upon the road, before the Cottage, so great a part of that fair night. He felt himself the guardian of these poor children; did not care to leave them, far and unwatched, in their new sense of great loneliness.

Ernest suffered himself to be persuaded to go to bed when Mr. Arle left, thinking that Hilda went too; but she sat for hours where he left her.

A light wind rose and moaned, just audibly, around the house; the sea sounded a little upon the rocks as the tide came in. Hilda, listening to these sounds, thought of the wide expanse of land and sea stretching between her and her father’s grave: the coldness of a dull despair settled round her heart. At last, some recollection made her stir from her rigidity: she crept slowly up to her brother’s room. Ernest was asleep; a flushed cheek pressed down upon a wet pillow, showed that he had not slept long; she feared to disturb him. Muttering a

blessing, the heart-wrung earnestness of which touched her to tears again, she went away. On her knees, by her own bed-side, a wailing cry forced its way from between her lips ; but she stifled it, burying her head, and prayed.

When her praying grew quiet and resigned, she was soothed out of her painful wakefulness, and, towards morning, fell asleep, on her knees, her cheek resting upon her icy, folded hands.

The early sun, shining in at the eastern window, found her thus—woke her to a sense of physical and mental pain. She was so chill and stiff, so utterly heart-sick, at first, that she did not try to move. But the sun, rising higher, its warmth falling on her, brought her some sense of life and power—enough to enable her to rise and creep about that day, controlling herself, and watching over Ernest ; at evening, that degree of strength failed her.

Next morning she could not rise ; she was prostrated by low fever : it was many days before Dr. Winley would let her leave her room.

Her complaint was not contagious, and Alcina was allowed to be with her, much to the poor child's relief. Mr. Arle had left her with Mrs. Winley on his return, and would not bring her to the Cottage with him the next day, thinking the sight of her might trouble Hilda. But, in her quiet days of convalescence, while she yet kept her own room, yet suffered from that extreme physical weakness which is a boon sometimes, lessening the power of mental pain, Hilda took a sad pleasure in having the child with her, in hearing all she could tell about her father—all he had said and done since they parted.

Mr. Arle was very restless and miserable while Hilda kept upstairs ; little Mrs. Winley—who staid at the Cottage while Hilda was at the worst—was astonished ! she had never seen him so disturbed, so impatient and unmanageable in all the years she had known him, she told her husband. When Hilda was able to go downstairs again, looking a shade or two paler, a little thinner, her eyes larger and more lustrous, from the violet circles round them, and the transparent delicacy of the rest of her face, her friend was obliged to be less with her ; it was wonderful how she had managed to leave home and her three little ones as she had done. Now it was no longer needful, it was perfectly impossible that she should do so.

Hilda's first turn round the garden was taken leaning on Mr. Arle's arm ; when he was present, his care precluded the possibility of care being exercised by anyone else ; he very quietly assumed a right no one but Hilda would have dared question ; she did not care to do so *yet*. She sometimes thought wonderingly of his old roughness and abruptness towards her, his apparent dislike of her ; perhaps it suited him to be only with those who were weak, dependent, obedient ; and his old manner would return, when, if ever, she should regain her old strength and spirit. Now his whole being seemed to be devoted to the service of these orphan children of his friend.

Hilda began to think about the future ; what it would be best for Ernest that they should do ; there were innumerable reasons why they must change their place of residence and their manner of life ; yet the thought of this change was fraught with pain Hilda could not yet well bear.

She sat in the garden one afternoon, pondering over these things very sadly ; Ernest and Alcina had set off for a ramble at her request, and she had been sitting, at work in the sun, alone. She had been thinking too anxiously ; Mr. Arle told her she did not look so well as she had done yesterday, when he came bringing her two letters.

“I do not know that I shall let you have them now,” he said, still withholding them, “you look weary already.”

“If I am weary it is of my thoughts. There may be something pleasant in those letters—let me have them if you please.”

The hand was weak, and could not be held out long without beginning to tremble ; the two letters were soon given into it.

Mr. Arle threw himself down upon the turf near Hilda—fell into a deeply thoughtful mood, his head rested on his hands.

There was a long silence, for Hilda often wiped her dimmed eyes as she read one letter—from Esther Boynton. The other was from Mrs. Meynard, enclosing, too, a most loving note from Anna ; reading all these was very trying.

Mr. Arle looked up enquiringly at last ; he met Hilda’s eyes full of tearful gravity.

“What is it ?”

“I wish you to advise me—I have kind invitations in both my letters—from Mrs. Meynard and the Boyntons. Esther Boynton writes that Ernest and I *must* go to them at once, she is very kind—Would it be a good plan ? the change—the amusement—for Ernest ? They are very old friends of—papa’s, you know—we might stay there till—”

“Till?” Mr. Arle asked, very gently.

“Till I am quite strong and have settled about the future—how and where we will live and——”

“Leave the future! Don’t look so far forward! Would *you* like to go to Hampstead for a while? Could you be content, at rest there?”

“There as well as anywhere—it would be a good change for Ernest—Yes! I do not think I have any right to refuse their kindness.”

Hilda waited for some remark—Mr. Arle made none; he was looking steadfastly in another direction.

“You think we should go?” Hilda asked timidly.

“Well! Yes! I suppose you should. I daresay you would wish to go soon,” he answered carelessly.

“Perhaps it should be soon,” poor Hilda replied—her heart aching to hear this, her final departure from an endeared spot, spoken of so lightly.

“I think it should.” Mr. Arle had not glanced at her pained face, his was bowed down; he added—“There is little to keep you here now.”

That remark was just the one thing more than Hilda could bear; she fancied that Mr. Arle thought her glad to leave—very ungrateful; tears rushed up again, as she said—

“Oh, Mr. Arle! I thought, I hoped, that you understood me. I have never tried to express my sense of what we owe you, because——And this place, too, do you believe that I do not feel my heart ache at the thought of leaving it?”

She could hardly restrain the wild passion of tears, it would have been such a relief to shed.

Mr. Arle was at her side—he took her hand ; but her eyes could not meet the intense look in his, they were downcast and heavy. He spoke quietly, as if with great restraint, and said—

“ Do not be troubled. I do understand you—well enough to think you can only act from just and noble motives. Sometimes I am hasty ; just now I have much to perplex me—find it hard to do and speak as I should. Forgive me, Hilda ! I know it will pain you to leave this place, that you are denying yourself after your brave, womanly fashion, when you resolve to do so. But you are very right—this change will be best, for you and the boy.”

“ And you, Mr. Arle, after your fatigue and—”

“ I ! Ah ! I do not know. But the sun has set, and the dew is falling. Dr. Winley would scold us. You must go in-doors.”

“ It is cool now,” Hilda said, rising.

“ I hope you are not cold ! No ! but this is a trembling hand on my hand. Avoid troubling yourself about that perplexity, the future, pray ! Believe me, you are not strong enough, it is fighting against yourself ! Just try and be at rest. I know, from experience, my advice sounds absurd, but—”

That sentence was not finished. At the house-door Mr. Arle bade Hilda good-bye ; he had work to finish that night. He left, adding a fervent “ God keep and console you ” to his quiet “ Good evening.”





CHAPTER XXXI.

“**S**o you are going away for a bit, poor dear !” Mrs. Danall said to Hilda, who, the day before her departure, crept over to the Poplars. Alone, as she wished ; for no one knew of her intention, and both Ernest and Alcina were gone somewhere with Mr. Arle.

“ Yes, I am going away ! ” Hilda answered, dreamily, looking forth from the sunny casement, saying to herself—“ I am here for the last time ; ” but not realizing that it was so.

“ May-be, after what has happened, it’s best you should have change. I did say, myself, many a time, no good would that foreign country do the poor gentleman ; it dries up the blood in the true English veins.”

“ It was not that—not the country that killed him ! Dr. Winley said he could not have lived half the winter through at Seadonfell—oh, papa ! papa ! It was not that ! ” Hilda covered her face, and repeated that wailing “ Papa ! papa ! ”

“I am an old fool ! You so weak and so white, and I to talk so ! Dear, now ! do not take on !—of course, the doctor and the master knew best, and I am an ignorant old woman. Look up ! dear heart. The master will never forgive me ; you will be ill again, and he'll never forgive me !”

“Do not be frightened, I am not strong, or ——there ! I am all right. I shall not do so again,” Hilda said, feebly.

“I trust I shall see you righter and brighter one day —you will come back with another face than that !” Mrs. Danall said, when she had put a stool for her visitor’s feet and a pillow for her to lean against.

“Come back ! We are not coming back—we give up the Cottage, and shall live somewhere else.”

“Oh ! so you do not think of ever coming back to Seadonfell ?” The old lady looked curiously at her pale visitor, who only shook her head.

“Dear, now !” Mrs. Danall continued ; “and only last night the master was here, helping Mr. Ernest in packing up his painting things ; it seemed a sorrowful thing to do to the young gentleman, and the master spoke to him cheery-like ; and while he was standing quiet, looking at a picture of you, a bit of a thing, that was done for him by Mr. Ernest, I began talking about Miss Alcy to him, saying how she would miss you, and be sad and lonesome, and asking what would he do about her, and he smiled, soft, to himself (as I didn’t look to see him smile again), and told me no need to trouble ; that things would settle themselves in good time ; that, perchance, some day, you might be minded to come back, and—but you look faint—

like, after your walk, Miss Stanton—I'll fetch you something, instead of standing, talking."

The old lady trotted off, and Hilda mused; a proud flush, mantling on her face, drove away the softness of a slow smile; but that faded quickly, giving place to an expression of sad and sweet, pale patience.

Hilda had not been at the Poplars since the day Mr. Arle awaited her home-coming; sitting in the darkest corner of the Cottage-parlour, his heart swelling with grief and compassion. Now, when before going home, she walked all round the place, recollections thronged upon her too cruelly; she had over-tasked her strength and her fortitude! She had refused Mrs. Danall's request that she would let Nance accompany her home; and repented the refusal, when once or twice she sat down by the wayside, almost despairing of getting further.

When at last she reached the Cottage, she found that Ernest and Alcina had not yet returned. She sat in the parlour window, watching the sun set over the sea. It was the last time she should sit there to watch it! She drew back out of the exceeding glory that poured in—back into the shadow.

Mr. Arle was not to be deceived by the smile called up to welcome him and Ernest.

"What have you been doing with yourself since we left?" he asked, sternly.

"I have been to the Poplars, to say good-bye to the place, and to Mrs. Danall."

"Very imprudent!—very wrong of you to walk so far—doubly wrong to set off by yourself in that way."

"I preferred going alone—I could not leave without seeing the dear old place once more—could I?"

Mr. Arle turned abruptly away from the tearful, questioning eyes, and did not make any answer.

"Where is Alcina, Ernest?" Hilda asked.

"At Mrs. Winley's; they are to meet us at Liston to-morrow, to say good-bye."

Mr. Arle did not seem to have any sad or sentimental thoughts this evening; he made no allusion to the morrow's separation; he talked very cheerfully, brightening every topic he touched, but only winning from Hilda smiles so faint and brief that they pained him more than tears and sighs could have done. He left early, saying that he knew Hilda was very tired, and that she must recruit her strength for the journey—very early, considering that they three might never again pass a quiet evening together.

Only a common "good night" was said, then Mr. Arle was gone, and Hilda bowed her head down upon the sofa-cushion with a sense of extreme desolation. Was not Mr. Arle unkindly careless? he did not seem to heed their going! She had thought he did care somewhat for them!

"We shall see Mr. Arle again? at Liston, to-morrow?" she asked Ernest, when he came back from accompanying Mr. Arle part of the way.

"No, he will not be at Liston; he said he should come up here in the morning, he might be of some use; Mrs. Winley is coming too."

"Oh!"

"Of course you know that he is going with us?"

“Where?”

“To London—you didn’t know! I thought, of course, you did.”

“No one has told me anything about it.”

“How funny! Then you don’t know, perhaps, that Mr. Arle is going abroad again when he has seen us settled at Hampstead. Poor Alcina is to live with Mrs. Winley; I think she would break her heart only that she seems to fancy we are coming back, and I do not like to undeceive her.”

“Mr. Arle is going abroad again!”

“Yes,” Ernest said, proud to find that he alone had been told this; “only for a short time, he says—not to Spain, he doesn’t know or care where—to Italy, he thinks. He would take me, only he knows that I should not dream of leaving you—I could not leave you. Oh, Hilda! if it were not for you and Mr. Arle I wouldn’t care to live, or paint, or anything *now*;—but isn’t he very good to me, Hilda? He says that, by degrees, I must learn to think of him as if he were really my father—that is impossible, of course, though I do love him very much.”

“He is very good,” Hilda answered absently.

The brother and sister separated; Ernest to sleep soon, and dream—Hilda sat long at her window, looking out towards the Poplars, through the pure June night—questioning her heart as to how the change, or loss, of all its dearest things was to be borne.

* * * * *

Bernard Boynton met the three travellers at the end of their journey; it was late at night; Ernest was excited and lively, but Hilda quite worn out—too weary to notice

much, till she found that Mr. Arle, after settling her comfortably in the carriage, wished her and Ernest good night, and made way for Bernard to jump in, still holding her little hand in his. Why! was this good bye as well as good night?

“We shall see you early to-morrow, however?” Bernard asked.

Hilda leaned forward to hear the answer, but her hand was dropped, and they drove away; she saw that Mr. Arle stood looking after them.

“So Arle is going abroad again? He is possessed by a restless spirit!” Bernard said. By the light of a flaring lamp they passed, he tried to read the expression of Hilda’s face.

But she had sunk back into a corner: he obtained no further information from her than a simple “Yes,” and turned to talk to Ernest.

They left the rows of gas-lights behind them, turned into quiet lanes. Every now and then a delicious odour from dew-touched hay was wafted in at the carriage windows; so Hilda knew they were near their destination.

Arrived, kind Esther took charge of her pale, sad guest — did not leave her till she had seen the weary head laid down upon the pillow, and extracted a promise from Hilda that she would not try to join the early family breakfast to-morrow.

Hilda was too tired to sleep; she lay awake, thinking of all that had happened when she was last here, and since. But, after dawn, sleep came to her, at last. Full, bright summer day-light was filling the room when she awoke.

She had the same rooms she and Anna had occupied;

they had been freshly and prettily decorated for her—the sitting-room especially, where she was to employ herself whenever she chose to be alone ; it was all white and delicate green—green walls, soft white muslin draperies. Two tiny white vases, filled with lilies of the valley, set in masses of their leaves, stood on the mantel-piece ; and on brackets against the wall were placed two exquisite Parian statuettes. In the window, there was a stately Arum in an ornamental vase. The light came in dim and cool, through green blinds. In every detail there was evidence of thoughtful kindness. Some one had been there that morning to throw up the window and arrange the blinds, so that they kept out the sun, not the prospect. Hilda had risen with a violent headache ; the pure-looking dimness and the airiness of her pretty room were very grateful to her.

She sat down in the low chair beside the Arum in the window, enjoying the delicious wind and looking out over the Heath. All without looked unaltered since she had sat there on such a day a year ago ; yet what change had not the intervening months brought ! It was not wise, or safe, to look back. Hilda's feverish thoughts glanced onward ; but the Future seemed to her as a shadowy figure, standing afar off, its cowled head averted ; it was mere self-torment and bewilderment to endeavour to make out its form and features. So, her aching brow resting on her hand, Hilda fell deep into dreamy reverie.

Voices sounded from the garden, floated up and in at the window ; Bernard's, Ernest's, Esther's, Mr. Arle's, they did not disturb her.

A gentle knock at her door, however, made Hilda start.

It was Esther bringing her some tea. Esther had been in before ; but only to listen at the bed-room door, and, hearing no stir, to steal away again.

“ You are so very kind, dear Esther ! you will spoil me.”

“ I must improve you first,” Esther answered, looking at the white face and thin hands ; she brought a little colour into the former, saying—

“ Mr. Arle has been here some time ; he has asked if you were up once or twice ; but I said you should have some breakfast before you saw any one but me.”

“ But, perhaps, he is going soon ! ” Hilda answered ; “ I had better go to him at once.”

She rose ; but Esther made her sit down again.

“ There is no hurry,” she said ; “ Mr. Arle is an impatient person, Hilda ; you must not indulge him too much. I think he had better come to you now. There are some people down-stairs whom you don’t know, and I am sure Mr. Arle will prefer seeing you alone, to bid you good-bye. Besides, dear, I shall be rather proud for him to see this room—see that other people can care for you—which he chooses to doubt, I fancy ! ”

“ It is such a pretty room ! You are always considerate, most thoughtful, Esther.”

Esther went, carrying away the tray she had brought—she never could learn that it was as well to serve her friends by deputy as in person.

Hilda sat still—In a few moments Mr. Arle had come in, wished her good-morning, asked after her health, and seated himself in the window, on the other side of the stately Arum. They began talking absently of things

indifferent; meanwhile watching the shadows of the summer-clouds chase one another over the Heath.

“You know I am going abroad?” Mr. Arle asked abruptly, at last.

“Yes.”

“Were you surprised?” with a look of keen enquiry.

“Yes,” rousing herself to give something beyond the monosyllabic answer Hilda added—“I thought you were tired of travelling, Mr. Arle, loved England and Seadon-fell, and hated strange places.”

“I am heartily tired of travelling, of all change; I have had little rest all my life: but I am unsettled just now—could not endure to be long in any one place, certainly not at Seadonfell.”

Hilda’s eyes met his in soft surprise—then fell. Mr. Arle went on in a manner not his own.

“I don’t know where I shall go—I shall be a wanderer on the face of the earth for a few months—driven about by any wind—to begin with, I start on a pretty long sea-voyage, to night; I shall come home late in autumn, and then—why then I hope we may all see our way clearer than it looks at present—now—”

“Mr. Arle!” Hilda exclaimed—he looked up at her quickly—“You are spoiling that beautiful Arum blossom.” He had been curling one round his finger.

“Pshaw! Is that all?” He drew his chair back from the flower impatiently. Soon he leaned forward again, looking full at Hilda, asked.

“Do you feel that, for a few months, you can be content, at rest, here?”

“I shall stay here for a while,” Hilda answered, a slight

reserve in her tone, which he noted instantly. "They are very kind, and I shall get strong, and have time to consider —"

"To get strong is your one duty, at present. This air is nothing like ours at Seadonfell; perhaps it suits you best now. I need not—I don't care—to speak to you of the duty of regaining cheerfulness—of re-learning hope: you will overcome your present weakness and weariness, and be again brave—only, I pray, not too independent."

"I shall do what I can of what I know I ought to do," Hilda answered, with eyes downcast, heavy with tears.

"The 'ought' is limited by the 'can';' don't make much effort of any kind. And, Hilda! when we meet again, I shall almost hope to see the old spirit of defiance looking out from your eyes only—don't let the defiance be of *me*."

Mr. Arle saw a heavy tear splash down upon the black dress; he rose, looked round the room, went on speaking in a measured tone, that told of inward restraint.

"Yes! this is a pretty, cheerful room—a pleasant place. You have a piano, I see, and books. By-the-bye, I had a few packed I thought you would like—they came out with me this morning. Ernest's properties have been taken to Mr. Bernard's studio. I am glad, for my boy's sake, that your friend's wedding is postponed for a few months." Breaking off, and coming close to Hilda, he said—

"Of course, you will write to me often. I shall manage always to let you have a sufficient address. You promise to write?"

"Ernest will write, and I too, sometimes, if you wish."

"If I wish! Well! I do wish. I must go soon, and

I have been putting off the principal thing I have to say. I have a favour to ask—will you grant it, Hilda ?”

“ It will be a pleasant novelty, if *I* can do anything for *you*,” Hilda said, looking up brightly.

“ You are wise ! I pardon you the evasion of that answer for the sincerity I read in your eyes. I not only beg a very great personal favour, but I shall make a request with which I have a right to expect you will comply; yet, perhaps, I had better keep to the humbler tone. I want your promise that you will remain here, quiet, till we meet, unless Death should prevent my returning within a certain time—your promise that you will form no plans for the future, or, at least, take no steps towards executing them ; that you will not rashly set to work towards the fulfilment of any proud scheme till you have personally consulted me, and —”

“ In short,” Hilda interrupted—a flush on her cheek, and a light in her eye—“ you wish me to pledge myself to be idle and dependent, till such time as you shall return to think and act for me ! No, Mr. Arle, I can make no such promise. He—papa—did not mean this when he told me to trust you. I have trusted you—I shall trust you —how can I help it ?—but I cannot be dependent. I will consult you about any plans I may form, if you will help me to help myself.”

“ You would fain make my guardianship a mere nominal thing ! I respect your noble spirit ; but I cannot explain now, I am fettered—must entreat you to trust me. Your brother is legally in my power—may I not rule you through him ?”

“ Ernest is mine ; my father would not have taken him

out of my care! I must live and work for him, or else nothing is left me." She added, more quietly—"I am sorry, Mr. Arle, very sorry to refuse any request of yours; but I cannot bind myself by a promise to be idle and dependent, when I have the power to work, and see a way open."

"A woman should be dependent."

"Yes! upon those she—belongs to. But for her, merely because she is a woman, to be content to be always a burden on some one, when she has power to support herself—that is pitiful, cowardly! Mr. Arle, you need not fear, we shall not be able to do without your council and help. I know you will use generously whatever power you have over Ernest. You will not add the pain of acting in opposition to you, to the hardness of all my life."

"That would be pain, then?"

"Indeed it would!"

He was silent—he had resumed his seat opposite her: again that tortured blossom was unfolded from its own graceful curl to be twisted round his finger.

Hilda thought she had won her cause; she was mistaken in Mr. Arle. Presently he looked up and said, in a quiet voice—

"I will come home at the end of September—that is rather less than three months. Will you remain here, 'idle and dependent,' till then? Do not refuse this request lightly; then you shall honour me with your confidence. Yield to me in this one thing, Hilda, and you shall have your way in one and a thousand."

Hilda meditated. What was it he asked, after all?—

no great matter—three months would soon go by. If he would only explain,—he might have some plan for Ernest.

He watched her.

Looking up, she saw his eyes clouded—an expression of pain over his face—it cleared away as she said—

“Mr. Arle! as you are so urgent—so obstinate—you must have reason—good reason—I will believe, for being so. I will do as you wish.”

“Thank you!—your hand—we seal a compact.” He held the little hand fast in his and rose. “This is a relief to me! I thought we should have a stormy parting—two strong wills clashing warringly. I am a somewhat weary man, and, God knows, tired of storm, change, and doubt. He only sees the end, if my life shall drift into a calm haven. Anyway, may He give you rest, my child! you shall never regret your compliance with my wish.”

Hilda, woman as she was, felt, indeed, a very child, as she rose and stood up before Mr. Arle. His words brought a sense of quiet upon her spirit. She looked up at the kind face above her; then blessed him at this parting, in a few words; bowed her head down lower and lower, till her lips lightly touched the hands imprisoning hers. But those hands were almost angrily withdrawn—she was pressed to Mr. Arle’s bosom, felt his lips warm upon her cheek. Then she was alone: her cheeks were flushed; her breath came fast and thick.—What was this?

The momentary calm of child-like trustfulness was broken up; the woman in her almost repented the action of childish confidence. But it was not wrong—he surely

could not misunderstand!—they were parting for long—she owed him so much. For once, she wished him to feel that she loved him with a child's grateful love. They had been so nearly quarrelling, she had pained him! Yes! surely—that was all. But the flushed cheek did not immediately pale, or the heart beat quietly.





CHAPTER XXXII.

HILDA had one great pleasure during the first part of her stay at Hampstead. Anna Meynard was allowed to pass a few weeks with her at the Boyntons'—this was a little reward for her patience, and Bernard's, under the postponement of their marriage.

Anna was not her own brilliant self when she came—Hilda's saddened and altered face grieved her deeply and she had had anxiety of her own to sober her spirits.

“We have so much to talk of, Hilda,” she said, “so much has happened since we met, that we shall not know where to begin.” So it seemed, for they were very often silent as they sat in Hilda's pretty room both busy with their needle-work.’

“It is something new, Anna, to see you so diligent!”

“Ah Hilda I have been learning to work and learning many another thing lately! I am to be a poor artist's wife, you know; at least mamma calls Bernard so.” The fine eyes were lighted up with a noble pride of wealth (if such a thing may be!)

"And I want to know how it is that you are not already a wife—You were to have been married this spring—were you not?"

"Mamma so much wished to keep me a little longer : I had no right to be anything but very humble and obedient, for—Hilda, I have not been so good, so steadfast, as I believed I should be, and I have given both her and Bernard needless pain."

The head drooped lower and the bright cheek burned ; but the face was raised quickly and proudly when Hilda said,—

"Anna ! You do not mean that you—"

"Not that I wavered an instant in my heart's choice—No ! but I gave people, my mother even, reason for thinking that I did : you know I was always too giddy and careless, and I found it pleasant to be admired—I used not to care for it, but when I was happy, felt secure of mamma's love and of her letting me marry Bernard some day, I enjoyed it, I enjoyed everything. I was very proud ; there seemed something grand in feeling one's power to win admiration, and one's willingness to give up all for love at the same time. Say that I was a vain, foolish child, please Hilda."

"Did you see much of Bernard last autumn and winter ?"

"Hardly anything ! In the winter, when I was so gay, I was staying with Eleanour, my sister-in-law. You know she made a 'sensation' last winter. I never met Bernard there : I did constantly meet a person mamma would have been very pleased if I could have liked—somehow we were always being thrown together—I didn't

like, or dislike him, and didn't believe he cared for me :— we amused each other, I think, and were always rattling on together. Hilda ! how could it have been ? What possessed me ? I cannot think how I acted so thoughtlessly ! ”

“ Did you not think much about Bernard ? ”

“ I almost always thought of him ! whenever I was weary, and so, through a chink, seemed to glimpse the hollowness of the life I was leading ; I had only to turn my thoughts to him to feel refreshed.”

“ But, child, didn't you think he must be unhappy, and feel sorry for him ? ”

“ I believed him so sure of my constancy—I was so sure of it myself ! and thought of him as working on his dear work in patience. But all that changed ; I roused up when I met him suddenly one day. We were coming from the opera, my hand was on that other person's arm, and he was talking as usual, when, all at once, I saw Bernard ! There was a great crowd, he was a long way off, leaning against the wall, in a corner, letting the people push past him, watching for me. I saw him before he saw me, he looked worn and wistful ; when our eyes met I forgot everything but him, all proprieties. He smiled, his old, bright smile, at my eagerness as I pushed on towards him.”

“ And your companion ? ” Hilda asked.

“ I wonder what answers I made to what he said ! He looked down at me in surprise, and his eyes followed mine. I didn't care, we reached Bernard at last ; I pulled my hand from where he held it tightly and gave it to Bernard. Bernard was more collected than I was—‘ I

musn't keep you from your party,' he said 'I only wanted a look or a touch from your majesty's hand.' There was just a little reproach in his tone that went to my heart. The crowd rushed between us, and my escort drew my hand through his arm again. He asked if that were my brother, or cousin, with a sneer at the last word. I blushed violently, answering 'No,' because I met mamma's watchful eyes, knew that she had seen all."

"Did your nameless admirer ask any further questions?"

"Not of me; he asked another gentleman, 'Who the devil is that man Meynard is speaking to?' Hendon was talking to Bernard. I didn't hear the answer; but, after that, I saw little of my fine friend."

Anna's face was flashing with its old mischievous mirth. "It is so funny to hear the way the young 'exclusives' talk of men who are not in their set—not fashionable at all; but only infinitely their superiors in every conceivable way."

"And your mother, Anna?"—a question that made Anna grave.

"We had a stormy scene when we got home. Mamma had reason to be angry; she had begun to hope that I was gradually forgetting Bernard; she did not understand either of us, or she could not have thought so. It was days before she forgave me, and I was so miserable that I became ill. I think mamma was frightened then. Eleanour came in one morning, said she must know all about it—made me tell her—questioned me, was I sure I had made up my mind? She promised to plead for me: she has great influence with mamma. When I was well

again, Eleanour asked Bernard to the house. After that I did not go anywhere where he was not asked, and it was known that we were engaged. Mamma continued cold, said that, 'as my prospects were blighted,' the sooner I was married the better. The last day of May was fixed. Before it came, while mamma and I were living quietly in the country, she relented towards me; she expressed a wish to keep me a little longer, and I and Bernard both thought it only right to yield to her desire. You see, Hilda, I am *not* worthy of Bernard; but, God helping me, I will be more so yet."

"I feel sure you will, dear."

"You have told me nothing about your brother, Anna," Hilda said, when they had both silently followed their own thoughts a while.

"I have nothing pleasant to tell you—nothing you will like to hear," Anna answered, with a sigh. "Poor Hendon! it seems as if all his life would be a failure, and I suppose it is his own fault!"

"But are they not happy?—your sister-in-law married him because she loved him?"

"Yes, she married him for love; and, a few months after, some kind friend told her an exaggerated story of her husband's conduct to his first love."

"Her own brother knew the true one, part of it, at least."

"Mr. Larne is selfish and careless. He wished his sister to marry—they do not agree. I did what I could to set matters right by telling Eleanour the plain truth, as far as I knew it."—Anna glanced sharply at Hilda's bowed and steady face.—"But she had been so open with

him—had told him all her past history, and she was very deeply wounded at his want of confidence."

"*You like Eleanour still, I hope?*"

"She fascinates me—when I am with her, I love her: she has been most kind to me. She seems a glorious creature, spoilt, almost, by no fault of her own. She told me her story one day; it made me miserable; she might have been such a noble woman, if she had been allowed to marry the man she loved when she was young."

"If she is so fascinating, she might make her husband love her."

"She does not care to try now; she believes he only married her for her fortune. She treats Hendon with a kind of civil contempt, and is an acknowledged queen in circles where he is nobody. She seems to have turned to the world for her consolation in her disappointment; and you know the world's way is to be very kind to those who can render it gift for gift."

"You speak like a woman of experience, Anna."

"I told you I had learnt a great many things."

"It is a sad account you give. Do you think your sister-in-law still loves her husband at heart?"

"Yes!—she said to me once, passionately, that, spite of all, she did and must."

"There is hope for them yet, then; God grant that they may come together, at last." Tears were in Hilda's eyes as she spoke.

"Isn't it strange how few happy people there are in the world?—one doesn't seem to have any right to hope to be among the number. Hilda! may I now ask you one thing?"

“ What is it ? ”

“ You know, *now*, that you did not love Hendon as — as I love Bernard—and as you *can* love—do you not ? ”

“ Perhaps I do, Anna. Yes ! I did not love him rightly, as a wife should her husband ; but, I do not talk of these things,” Hilda answered, the quiet sadness of her tone recalling much to Anna’s mind.

But this was not the only, or the most decided attempt the young girl—so learned now in love—made to find out how matters stood between Hilda and Mr. Arle, who ought, as she and Bernard both thought, to “ fall in love,” with one another. But Hilda’s calm simplicity baffled Anna’s ingenuity, more than any studied caution and concealment could have done. Hilda neither talked nor thought of these things ; even if Anna had dared say plainly “ Does he love you ? —do you love him ? ” she might truly have answered “ I do not know ! ” So Anna went away with a lively and quite-unsatisfied curiosity, obliged to wait Time’s unveiling of this, as of many another mystery.

After she was gone, the weeks and months wore away somewhat wearily to Hilda ; she was much alone, and the languor consequent on late suffering and excitement, disinclined her for exertion. Memory, as yet, came linked too closely with wild regret ; the present seemed a blank, and her thoughts would busy themselves with the future. She tried, while planning a life of work—of work for Ernest—not to trouble herself about things wanting to make life bright and fair ; but to prepare herself to be calmly content with a pale-hued existence of toil and duty, if it should be God’s will to appoint her such.

Hilda's correspondence with Mr. Arle was regular and most unsatisfactory. His letters to her sometimes contained little more than an address and the command "write!" Such being the case, she could not tell what or how to write; then she received a brief and fiery remonstrance. But very often Mr. Arle enclosed longer letters for Ernest, containing graphic descriptions of places, terse relations of incidents of travel. Through these letters many a thought of Hilda peeped; so that Bernard said, laughing, one day when Ernest showed him Mr. Arle's last epistle—"I should be jealous, Ernest, this is written for, it might as well have been written to, your sister."

The time fixed for Mr. Arle's return drew very near, yet he had not spoken of any intention to turn homewards.

As Hilda's strength had returned, her patience had ebbed; she desired change and action; something to rouse her from the dreamy, self-indulgent existence that she felt to be so bad a preparation for what was to come.

Esther smiled softly and strangely when Hilda expressed to her a little of what she was feeling; she chid her pride of independence, and bade her be patient. Something in that gentle smile made Hilda feel more nearly angry with Esther than she had ever done before; she thought it was only that she was growing irritable, fretted by enforced inaction. She was angry at the dominion one person had established in the realm of her thoughts—did not seek to understand why, or how, he ruled; but, resenting being fettered by a troublesome promise, was very anxious to be released from it—so have the entanglement of her future with his at once unwound.

Even Ernest, interested and occupied as he had been, found time now to long for Mr. Arle's return—to wonder and be uneasy that they neither saw him nor heard of him: for it was the last week of September, and Mr. Arle was a man of his word.

During her long, lonely days, or in the evenings, when they all assembled, a sound of wheels, or a quickly-opened door, could make Hilda start, and send the blood rushing from heart to brow. At such times, when she felt herself shiver and sicken from disappointment, she would wonder if, when he came, indeed, she should be able to meet him as she ought, as she must.

But, at the very last, there was little room in her heart for anything but dread. Mr. Arle's words, "unless death retard my return," would recur to her. Perhaps it was to be the stern discipline of her soul to lose *all* dear to it!

On the last evening of September, they were all in the drawing-room at the twilight hour, gathered round the fire. Mrs. Boynton was well enough to leave her room that day, and Bernard and Ernest were come home. They were very quiet, for Mrs. Boynton slept placidly upon the sofa, and her good man dozed in his arm-chair. The rest of the party were apparently busy with their own thoughts—with the exception of Ernest, who was stretched on the hearth-rug, trying to read by the uncertain firelight. It was a wild, gusty evening, and Hilda's eyes were intently watching the swift scudding of the clouds across the watery-looking moon.

Suddenly, all sleepers and dreamers were aroused.

There was a noise in the hall, the sounding of a clear,

rather loud voice. Before Bernard or Ernest, who had both sprung up, had crossed the room, Mr. Arle had entered it.

With the opening of the door, light streamed in from the hall ; without that Mr. Arle's quick eyes might have detected Hilda's place among the fireside group—yet he greeted everyone else first: shook hands heartily with Bernard and Bernard's father, bent over Mrs. Boynton with gentle congratulations, turned to Esther with courteous friendship, and cordially returned Ernest's embraces — receiving, too, many expressions of warm welcome.

Then came Hilda's turn—how glad she was of the duskiness ! but, as he held her hand, took the seat some one had put for him beside her—his keen glance seemed to read her face, spite of the dim light.

The arrival seemed very thoroughly to have roused everyone—there was a hum of conversation and a bustle of preparation. Tea and lights were brought in, and, as Esther bade, arranged on a distant table. Nobody spoke directly to Mr. Arle, and he did not seem to mind anybody but the owner of the hand that had, at last, escaped from his, and lay pale and cold on the black dress.

Hilda, leaning back, sat quite in shadow ; Mr. Arle, stooping forward, looking into the fire, talked to her quietly, glancing at her only now and then.

“ Had she been patient or impatient ?—had she resented his stretching her promise to its utmost limit ? ”—he would know.

She had been impatient ! Well ! he had been much more so, for very different reasons. So impatient that,

as he never suffered civil war and mutiny in his own peculiar domain, he had resolved to conquer this impatience, or do penance for it—so, had protracted his absence to the utmost limit of his promise. Besides, he said, he was an epicure as regarded this one great joy of home-coming ; he had not so many pleasures that he could afford to snatch and squander them hastily ; even this one might turn to pain—she knew best, if it would, if it must, if so he would strive to say, only, God help him, and still and ever bless her !

He looked so strange, talked so quietly, even dreamily, that Hilda felt as if she herself were dreaming : she had no power to move, or open her lips ; he did not seem to expect any answer. He moved his chair a little, turned from her and towards the room—screening her from the observation of any eyes.

Then Hilda passed her hand over her eyes—it was no dream ; she did not want to speak, or be spoken to, more than that night—she longed to be alone, to think. She looked towards the door ; but she was blocked in—Mr. Arle's chair filled up the space between hers and Mrs. Boynton's sofa, and Mr. Arle was talking to Bernard with great animation, about towns, lakes, and mountains. She must go ! her head seemed growing confused ; if any one should speak, how could she answer rightly ?

She half rose, then reseated herself—Mr. Arle was conscious of her movement ; he did not pause in his sentence, or look towards her, but the obstacle was removed.

She glided from the room and flew upstairs to her own quiet retreat—once away it was impossible to go back.

Esther came in two or three hours afterwards and

found her reading—looking pale, and as if she had been crying, but very tranquil. She was just going to undress, she said.

Esther told her that Mr. Arle stayed with them while he remained at Hampstead; then bade her good-night and went away—inwardly marvelling at something she read in the quiet face.





CHAPTER XXXIII

HILDA woke next morning with a bewildered sense of something having happened to her, of something to be gone through that day. She looked out on a day after her own heart, soft, bright, and breezy; there had been rain in the night, and light clouds were driven rapidly before the west wind, the heaven between being very purely blue.

She had risen very early, and yet was the last person to appear in the breakfast-room.

Mr. Arle seemed well content with her daylight appearance.

“ You ran away from me last night strangely ! ” he said, when the dark eyes veiled themselves from his earnest look, and Hilda turned away.

After breakfast he came to where she had settled herself with her work.

“ We must have a walk this morning,” he said ; “ this is just such a morning as you like. Do you remember,”

he added, with a peculiar smile, "that we have much to talk over?"

"I have not forgotten!" Hilda answered, demurely, without looking up. "My plans are formed, I have only to submit them for your approval; they are very rational, so you will, of course, sanction them."

His face clouded—they were not alone—he only listened as she went on gravely, her eyes still bent on her work.

"If I could be happy in dependence, anywhere, it would be with such kind, dear friends as these. As it is, I shall accept invaluable service from them. My plan is, that Ernest should at present study under Bernard, as they both wish; I mean to get a cheap home for him and me, somewhere between this place and London, and hope to be able to defray our expenses and lay by something for Ernest's future by adding to our small income my own earnings. I studied very diligently all last winter, and I hope I am not very ill-prepared for going out as a governess, if that should be necessary."

"That is well! you go out as a governess! extremely rational! how long do you think you should live such a life?"

"How long should I live?" Hilda said, for the first time glancing up at Mr. Arle, who stood opposite her; his voice had been quiet from great constraint, but there was that in his eyes before which hers fell, yet she went on with a slight smile—

"I am made of sterner stuff than you imagine. How many do live so!—why should not I? It might not be so very pleasant a life that I should care to have it a very long one; but I should have Ernest—should be a 'useful

member of society?' Sometimes, especially on Sunday, Esther will have us here, and we shall enjoy the country. You see I have realized it all. Is it not a feasible scheme, Mr. Arle?"

"Very, Miss Stanton! I see you are quite self-reliant. In all this plan you ignore my existence, though."

"Friends are luxuries, not necessities. One may have to learn to do without them—yet why should I? What do you find so displeasing in my common-place, prudent looking forward? Esther!" Glancing round, Hilda saw that Esther was gone—they were alone. She stopped and bent her head lower over her work, afraid of she hardly knew what; but Mr. Arle was silent some time, pacing up and down the room.

Very gladly would Hilda have escaped; but she felt that would be only a cowardly putting off of the hour of trial—of a struggle that must come; so she sat still and waited. Presently Mr. Arle stopped before her, and said—

"Will you walk with me, or not, Miss Stanton? Perhaps you can spare me no time—must immediately put this scheme of yours into execution."

"I can spare you a little time, Mr. Arle, and it is a beautiful morning," Hilda replied, and rose.

"You will go, then?"

"Yes," she answered, engaged meanwhile in folding up her work and putting it away.

Mr. Arle watched her impatiently; she left the room without having looked at him.

"What does she mean?" he thought, resuming his fierce walk. "Is she so proud that, just to prove her

independence, she will carry out this detestable scheme at any cost?—or does she not know, feel—”

He had time for thought; it was long before Hilda reappeared. She was struggling with herself—heart and reason, love and pride, did battle. She felt the need of coming to some resolution—of understanding her position, what Mr. Arle would ask her, what she must reply. She could not be sure he loved her, she said to herself—and yet, last night, his looks, words, whole manner?

Her great dread was that out of compassion, friendship, anything but love, he meant to ask her to be his wife—arrogantly assuming that she would be ready to drop him a pretty curtsey and say “thank you” and “if you please, Mr. Arle.” His wife—Lyon Arle’s—on any such terms! sooner toil, starvation, eternal separation from all she valued: because—she loved him! How the white face crimsoned, the sad, weary eyes flashed.

But he had been deeply moved—was it only his pride that was stirred up by her opposition? How should she know! How could she act? He had power over her, and she must veil her heart from those keen eyes! Yes! there was that in it must be hidden.

Poor Hilda’s spirit cried upon her father: at that moment she felt orphaned indeed! She knelt, prayed and wept; tried to cast out pride and think only pure, meek, grateful thoughts.

She rose; how long she had been! And all this time Mr. Arle waited! But he did not scold her when she quietly announced that she was ready: perhaps he detected traces of tears upon her face, and noticed that it looked wan, its morning freshness gone, contrasted by the

lustreless black of all her garments. They went out in silence.

Would this silence ever be broken? It lasted long. Hilda walked on, looking steadily out into the distance. Mr. Arle strode beside her with a dark, troubled face—he thought he read stern purpose in her composed meekness.

They passed the seat under the hawthorn where they had met once after long separation—each wondered if the other remembered.

“Are you tired?” Mr. Arle asked at last. They were far from home; in the quiet country.

“No.” Hilda answered softly.

Then turning on her suddenly, he began vehemently.

“I do not understand you, Miss Stanton. What did you mean by all you said just now, speaking so calmly, so resolutely? Must you play out the part you have proposed to yourself at whatever cost of pain to me?”

“I may say that I do not understand you, Mr. Arle!” Hilda answered without pausing in her onward walk, without looking towards her companion. “What have I done, or said, to anger you? I have kept my promise and consulted you about my plans.”

“Hilda! did your eyes lie last night?—they spoke of gladness at my return—of—You were moved—your hand trembled.”

“I *was* glad to see you!—you have been kind, very kind, and I am not ungrateful!” Hilda said, hastily,—“I had been anxious—you startled me!”

“Was that all, Hilda? Do you not know, feel that I

love you ? Did I not see that you knew it last night ? I put plain questions, I want true answers."

"I think that, for my father's sake, you have learnt to like me—that in our common grief we grew dear to each other ; that you are generous—feel an interest in those for whom you have done so much."

"It is not that ! I love you, Hilda, you, for no sake but your own. Do you not know it ?"

Her calm began to break up before the passion of his tone ; but she answered—

"Mr. Arle, I have received kindness after kindness from you, till the weight of gratitude has been almost burdensome—I know nothing more. You pain me now ! "

"Ah ! I am rude, exacting—forgive me ! I forget how I have shrouded my heart. But, Hilda ! I have loved you so long that I am impatient of your not having seen it, felt it. If I can make you know that I love you—love you with my deepest life—that my heart's desire is to call you wife—that I love you as I have never loved—"

"Hush ! Mr. Arle," Hilda said, hurriedly — the miserable covering of pride was shrivelling up, falling from her—she made one more effort to hold it round her—"I have thought of you always as constant, to one, a memory and—"

"That was the boy's love—this is the man's ; I do not love again. I love first now—God give me more than a man's strength of endurance, if now I love in vain ! Hilda ! I have loved you longer than my man's pride would fain confess. Answer me just this—that you believe, *feel* that this is truth ? "

It was strange how they went on and on. A conviction,

that all, the soft air, soft sky, her own existence, and most of all the words she heard—all was an illusion—a fairy dream, came over Hilda, still kept her comparatively calm, though her pride failed from round her; she answered from that dream—

“I do feel it—if I already love you, it is because you are thoroughly true—so I must believe you.”

“If you already love me! Hilda, have pity! You are young, I am not, and sometimes have not dared hope. Search your heart—do you, can you love me ?”

“I can ; indeed, I think I do !” her dream voice replied.

“God ever bless you for that frank answer !”

He drew her hand through his arm—with what a sense of rest, of wonder, of infinite gratitude! He shortened his steps to suit hers, trembling and weary now. The strife was over—harmony established! Presently Mr. Arle said—

“Your father knew of this—of my love for you ; I told him a little before he died. It pleased him ; he joined our names in his dying blessing ; he gives you to me ; you may feel that he consecrates our troth-plighting.”

“I was thinking of him ; I do feel him present,” Hilda said, softly. A mourner at heart, she felt this new joy very solemn—this love awful, a gift from a dead father’s hand. She looked so grave and thoughtful, that any heart less true than Lyon Arle’s might have been hardly satisfied of her love. Though his arm pressed her hand against his heart, it seemed as if some spiritual presence were between them—Grief did not choose to

have his throne usurped by Love. A mist had gathered where Death, the destroyer, had passed, and this new-risen Sun of Life could not at once dissipate it. Hilda longed to fly to father, or mother, for sympathy ; to rest this burden of intense emotion on some loving heart ; yet the desire seemed treason towards this one friend, who would be father, husband, all to her—treason against the giver of this good and perfect gift. Infinite gratitude rose from her heart into her eyes.

They were near a plot of half-cleared wood. Mr. Arle marked the paleness of the sweet face he looked down upon. She was tired, he said, and half repented he had brought her so far. She believed she was a little tired, but had not felt it till he spoke — and the eloquent blood rushed over her face beneath his look, brightening it into blooming beauty. Mr. Arle found her a seat on a felled tree.

“ My own, at last ! ” he said, “ and I have a right to take care of you.”

“ You have done that very long,” she answered, softly. They staid a long while in the little copse.

The autumn wind made soft music, blowing the trees to and fro—now and then scattering down a few withered leaves upon them. The mild sunshine poured down on Hilda’s face, and the white eyelids were unwaveringly drooped ; she seemed to be looking into her own deepest heart, growing familiar with what had so long lain there unregarded.

Was it all a dream ? was she alone ? she heard only the wind ; saw only a little grass growing at her feet, a

few dead leaves scattered upon it. Should she lift up her eyes ?

She did shily, slowly. It was no dream then ; Mr. Arle was very near, leaning against a tree ; his arms folded, a soft smile on his mouth and his eyes—ah ! they met hers—they had the look in them she had met from them before, had not dared seek to understand. How clear and bright many a strange dark thing of the past was becoming, read by the understood light of that look.

Mr. Arle came to her—threw himself down at her feet—took the little ungloved hand, upon whose whiteness the sun shone dazzlingly, in his. The face upturned to hers wore a look of high steadfastness ; expressed love calm in its strength. Yet he would have both hands to press to his lips, his brow ; delighting in the security that they and their owner's heart were his so entirely.

“It is a solemn thing to win and to give *the* promise of life, the love of love, is it not Hilda ?” he asked in a quiet voice that thrilled through his listener's heart. “You are mine—I yours—we have exchanged lives. People call courtship the poetry, marriage the prose of love—we will not have it so ! Love deepening, esteem strengthening, harmony perfecting, our lives blending till it were past the power of devil, or angel, to resolve them into their separate individualities—My thread of life wound ever higher by these dear hands till ‘angel hands of fire’,

shall wind both threads in one higher and higher yet—will there be no poetry in this? Already I am changed—a new peace has come into me, your spirit, love! My soul has found rest, I feel it has, it will possess itself in patience now first—so be fit to make life's work perfect. Hilda! I have been a poor, proud fool! How I have struggled against loving you—all the while conscious that the struggle was unavailing! Since I yielded I have suffered as was right—pain and doubt. I am so much older than you—I feared you were learning a quiet affection which would preclude love."

"I might have done, I tried, but you were so uncertain, so changeable, you would not let me. Yet," Hilda added musingly, "when you seemed to like me best you called me 'child.' Call me so now," she said, softly.

"You were cruel or very blind this morning, dearest child—No, that name does not suit you—you are no child, but a woman, mine, my wife! Hilda, why did you torture me? I was presumptuous, unreasonable, was I? If you had only known my heart! But all that is over now—I am at rest—I shall grow young again in this dear rest. And you—you are content! Do not let us have any misunderstandings, storms to cloud our fair, calm heaven. You, dear love, brave girl, must do battle no more; you must lean on me and be quiet. We shall not need to make our love-history exciting by quarrels, recon-

ciliations, and scenes of passion. Life has already tried us both. We cannot have our love shaken to its fall, and patiently build it up afresh ; it rests now, thank God, on everlasting foundations—everlasting ! love, pure love, lives for ever ! ”

When they two went home, it was something more than common air that met them in the evening wind—that night the sunset burned with more than earthly glory.

For them all things had been created anew.

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